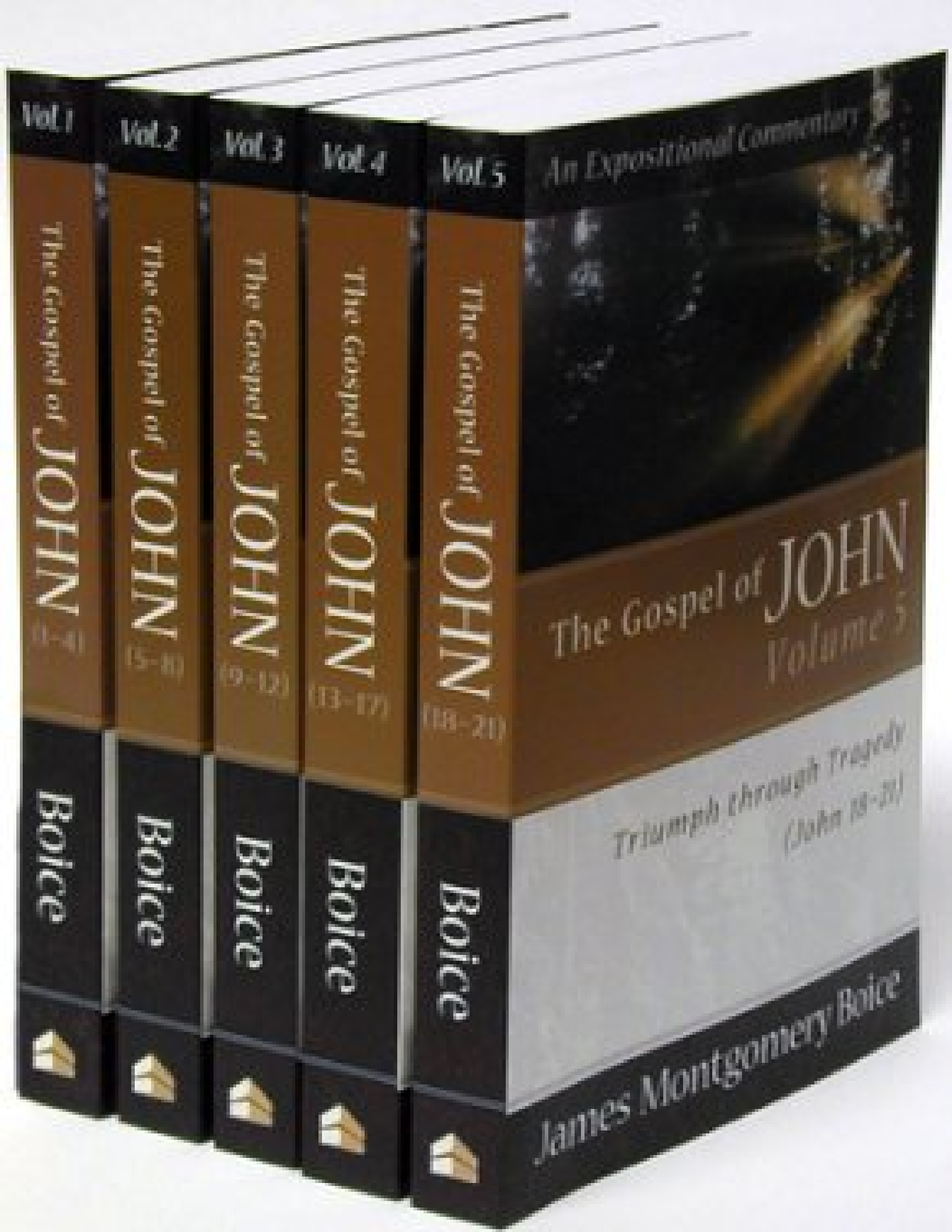
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The Gospel of John, Volume 1

The Coming of the Light (John 1-4)

by

James Montgomery Boice

To Him is light in whom is no darkness at all

Preface

It has been more than thirty years since I began to study the Gospel of John in a serious way and nearly twenty five years since my studies of the Gospel began to appear in print. They have been out of print for some time. So it was with much gratitude that I learned of Baker's interest in reissuing them in this revised and attractive version.

When I began in 1970 the studies which led to the writing of these five volumes, I anticipated some blessing from a book that has been a powerful source of instruction and comfort to many millions of God's people down through the ages of church history. But I was not quite prepared for the overwhelming blessing that attended them. Many have told me how they became Christians through hearing or reading these studies; and both Tenth Presbyterian Church, where they were first preached, and *The Bible Study Hour,* the radio program over which they were broadcast, have grown considerably. As for myself, the study of John caused me to appreciate the doctrines of the sovereignty and grace of God as I had not done before that time.

Over the years many different outlines have been given to John's Gospel. However, so far as I know, the one adopted for the purpose of this and the following four volumes is not paralleled elsewhere. This volume deals with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world and with the initial reaction of some persons to him. It covers the first four chapters of the Gospel. Volume two, covering chapters 5 through 8, deals with the hostility to Jesus that began to arise among the religious leaders. In volume three, chapters 9 through 12, Jesus will be seen

turning to his own and beginning to teach them. Volume four, chapters 13 through 17, covers the final discourses. The last volume, chapters 18 through 21, deals with the culmination of Christ's earthly ministry centering in his betrayal, trial, death, and resurrection.

I have subtitled these five volumes: (1) "The Coming of the Light," (2) "Christ and Judaism," (3) "Those Who Received Him," (4) "Peace in Storm," and (5) "Triumph through Tragedy." I believe this reflects definable segments of John's narrative and will aid anyone in achieving an overview of it.

At times in these studies I digress from the verses under immediate investigation to deal in a somewhat more comprehensive way with a subject introduced there. In this volume digressions occur on the subjects of witnessing (chapters 16-20) and baptism (chapters 21-23).

I need to express my debt to many writers and church leaders from whom I have learned and (in some cases) borrowed, though it is impossible to do that adequately in a preface such as this. I have consulted all the commentators known to me at the time I did my work on John, particularly Matthew Henry, B. F. Westcott, Arthur W. Pink, Leon Morris, and William Barclay. I am indebted to many evangelical preachers and writers such as Harry A. Ironside, Donald Grey Barnhouse, John R. W. Stott, Francis A. Schaeffer, and others who are referred to throughout these books. I found stimulation and direction in the sermons of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, though little of that debt appears until volume two.

As I do in all my volumes, I express special gratitude to the session and congregation of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, where I have served as senior minister for more than thirty years. From the beginning they have encouraged me to spend much of my time in this kind of study and writing. Miss Caecilie Foelster, who was my personal secretary for many years, carefully edited the manuscript in its first appearance and saw it through several stages of production. She has also contributed the Scripture index for this reissued volume.

May the Lord richly bless his Word and use these studies, where possible, to make that Word more widely known and more fully understood. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

James Montgomery

Chapter 1.
Introducing John's Gospel

John 1:1

The Gospel of John has blessed the hearts of God's people through the centuries. It has been called "God's love letter to the world." Luther wrote of it, "This is the unique, tender, genuine chief Gospel. ...Should a tyrant succeed in destroying the Holy Scriptures and only a single copy of the Epistle to the Romans and the Gospel according to John escape him, Christianity would be saved." Luther must have especially loved the Gospel because he preached on it for many years from the pulpit of the parish church of Wittenberg.

Some of the most widely known and best-loved texts in the Word of God are from this Gospel— John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"; John 6:35: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty"; John 10:11: "I am the good shepherd"; John 11:25: "I am the resurrection and the life"; John 15:1: "I am the true vine." There is the beloved fourteenth chapter: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back, and take you to be with me that you may also be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going. ...I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:1-4, 6).

Because of these and other passages, it is not surprising that the Gospel of John has been a source of blessing to untold generations of God's people. It has probably been the means by which more persons have come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord than any other single portion of Scripture.

A Unique Gospel

But the Gospel of John is merely one of four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—all of which tell of the life of Jesus Christ on earth. So we need to ask: What makes this Gospel unique? What makes John different? As one begins to read it, he soon notices some very obvious differences. Because of their similarities, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the synoptic Gospels; the three look at the life of Christ from similar viewpoints and employ similar and, at times, even identical language. John stands apart.

In the first place, John omits many things that either one or more than one of the synoptic Gospels include. John gives no account of Christ's birth. There is no mention of his baptism, although John clearly presupposes a knowledge of Christ's baptism on the part of his readers. The institution of the Lord's Supper is not included. There is no ascension. What is perhaps most striking of all, there are no parables, those pithy sayings of Jesus that occupy such a prominent place in the other accounts of Christ's teachings.

At the same time John shows a detailed knowledge of things that the other Gospels omit. For instance, John reports on an early ministry of Jesus in Judea. He indicates that the duration of Christ's ministry was close to three years, not one year, which is the impression one gets from reading the synoptic Gospels. John alone speaks of the changing of the water into wine at Cana. He alone tells of Nicodemus, of the woman of Samaria, of the raising of Lazarus. Only in John do we find the great discourses spoken by Jesus to his own disciples during the final week in Jerusalem.

Johannine Scholarship

It is probably because John is so different (and so spiritual) that some scholars have attacked this book strongly. Otherwise, it seems strange that this Gospel, which has been such a blessing to Christian people, should become the outstanding example among the New Testament books of what a section of God's Word can suffer at the hands of the higher critics of the Scriptures. One would have thought that the historical accuracy and apostolic authorship of John would have been defended stoutly. But this has not been the case until recently. Instead there had been a generation of scholarship (not so many years ago) that thought that John was not at all reliable. In this period all but the most conservative scholars said that the Gospel must have been written at least 150 or even 200 years after Christ's death. Many placed it in a literary category of its own as being something very much like theological fiction.

Today this is no longer true. There has been a remarkable change in the scholarly climate surrounding John's Gospel, with the result that it is becoming increasingly inadequate to deny the Johannine authorship. A new claim is even being made for the reliability of the Gospel as history. Moreover, this claim has come about, not because the scholarly world itself is becoming more conservative but because the evidence for the reliability of John has simply overshadowed the most destructive of the academic theories. Thus today men of such academic stature as Oscar Cullmann of the University of Basel, Switzerland, and John A. T. Robinson of England argue that the Gospel may well embody the testimony of a genuine eyewitness, as it claims. And some, like the late Near Eastern archaeologist William F. Albright, are willing to date the book in the A.D. 60s, that is, within thirty or forty years of Christ's death and resurrection.

At this point someone may say, "What has produced such a turnabout in the ways these men view the Gospel?" It is a good question. The answers to it are significant.

First, many ancient manuscripts and parchments of John or parts of John have been discovered, and these have pushed back the dating of the book. For a long time, before the great harvest of archaeological discoveries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the earliest copies of the fourth Gospel were from the fourth century, about A.D. 325 to 340. While this was much more impressive than any manuscript evidence for other ancient writings—for instance, the earliest manuscripts of Homer's verses were written about 2,000 years after his death— nevertheless, it gave scholars liberty enough to date John so late that it could not have been written by anyone who knew Jesus or even by anyone who could have known those who had known him.

The discovery of more ancient manuscripts has changed this. One ancient scrap of papyrus, which was originally found in Egypt as part of the wrapping of a mummy and is now part of the papyrus collection at the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England, alone destroys these theories. This piece of papyrus contains just a few verses of John 18 (vv. 31-34, 37, 38). But it dates from the first quarter of the second century—in other words, less than one hundred years after Christ—and thus shows that John's Gospel had been written early enough to have had a copy pass to Egypt to be used there and then to be discarded by the year A.D. 125. This is conclusive evidence for a fairly early dating of the Gospel.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

The second major factor in a reassessment of the dating and historical accuracy of John's Gospel has been the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These were uncovered in 1947 and the years immediately following, but the impact of their discovery is continuing even now as the scrolls are being unrolled, assembled, translated, and published.

Before the scrolls were discovered, scholars evaluated the differences between John and the synoptic Gospels in a way that was highly unfavorable to John. For instance, they noticed the unique language of John's Gospel, with its contrasts between light and darkness, life and

death, the world below and the world above, and so on. They noticed that the contrasts were generally lacking in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. "Well," they said, "it is obvious that the first three Gospels are Jewish and reflect a Jewish setting. But it is also obvious that John's work is not. John's Gospel must come from a Greek setting. Therefore, we must seek the origin of these unique terms not in the actual speech of Jesus of Nazareth but in Greek thought and particularly in Hellenistic Gnosticism."

Then the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. These revealed a whole world of nonconformist
Judaism that had simply not been known to scholars previously. The home of the scrolls was Qumran, not far from Jerusalem, in the very area where John placed the earliest events of Christ's ministry. And what was most significant, the literature revealed the same use of the so-called Greek terms (*logos*, light, darkness, life, death) that are found in John's Gospel and actually provided a far closer parallel to them.

One scholar, A. M. Hunter of Aberdeen University in Scotland, writes of these discoveries: "The dualism which pervades the Johannine writings is of precisely the same kind as we discover in the Dead Sea Scrolls." John A. T. Robinson writes: "I detect a growing readiness to recognize that this [the historical background of John's gospel] is not to be sought at the end of the first century or the beginning of the second, in Ephesus or Alexandria, among the Gnostics or the Greeks. Rather, there is no compelling need to let our gaze wander very far, either in space or time, beyond a fairly limited area of southern Palestine in the fairly limited interval between the crucifixion and the fall of Jerusalem." He adds that the Dead Sea Scrolls "may really represent an actual background, and not merely a possible environment, for the distinctive categories of the Gospel."

Other Factors

The historical trustworthiness of John's Gospel is also supported by John's accurate knowledge of the geography of Palestine. This has been vindicated increasingly by archaeological discoveries.

To be sure, John mentions many places that are also mentioned by the synoptic Gospels, so critics could say that these were only known secondhand from their writings. For instance, John could hardly tell the story of Jesus without mentioning Bethsaida (1:44; 12:21), the praetorium (18:28, 33; 19:9), Bethany (11:18), and so on. But John also speaks accurately of Ephraim (11:54), Sychar (4:5, which is probably to be identified with Shechem at Tell Balatah), Solomon's Porch (10:23), the brook Kidron, which Jesus crossed to reach Gethsemane (18:1), and Bethany beyond Jordan, which John carefully distinguished from the other Bethany near Jerusalem (1:28). All of these places are now known, and John himself has again and again been demonstrated to be accurate.

Two archaeological discoveries are particularly interesting. In 5:2, John mentions a pool called Bethesda that, he says, had five porches. For years no one had even heard of this pool. What is more, since John's description made it sound like a pentagon, and since there had never been any pentagon-shaped pools in antiquity, the existence of this pool was thought by many New Testament scholars to be doubtful. Now, however, approximately fifty to seventy-five feet below the present level of the city of Jerusalem, archaeologists have uncovered a large rectangular pool surrounded by four covered colonnades and having an additional colonnade crossing it in the middle somewhat like a bridge. In other words, there was a pool with five porches, as John said. It is conclusive evidence of John's accurate knowledge of the city of Jerusalem as it was before its destruction by the Roman general Titus in AD 70.

The second archaeological discovery involves the probable identification of Aenon near Salim, which John mentions in 3:23, as having "plenty of water" in the Jordan valley. It was obviously the place where John the Baptist found adequate water for his baptizing.

These three lines of evidence—the evidence of the manuscripts, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the knowledge of ancient geography—are also supported by other lines of discoveries. There has been an attempt to show that the author of the fourth Gospel (whoever

he may have been) must have spoken in Aramaic because, according to those who are experts in this field, Aramaic idiom underlies John's Gospel. Careful study of the text has convinced other scholars that the material preserved by John may be as old as Pauline theology or the traditions preserved by the Synoptics. Thus, a better knowledge of the author of the fourth Gospel and his times has succeeded in pushing scholars away from the critical postures they once held, and has caused them to admit not only the possibility of apostolic authorship but to speak even more surely of an early and very reliable tradition that underlies and is in fact preserved in the writing of the Gospel.

John's Purpose

What does this have to do with a study of what is obviously a spiritual Gospel? Just this: John himself insists upon the reliability of the things about which he writes. Take 1 John 1:1, 3 as an example. There John writes, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.... We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." In other words, John says that he is writing to them about a person whom he has heard, seen, and touched. Hence, he is writing about something objectively true that will bear the brunt of historical investigation.

John sounds the same note in the Gospel: *"Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name"* (John 20:30-31).

There are always people who will say that faith is something that must be entirely divorced from evidence. But that is not stated in the Bible. Faith is believing in something or someone *on the basis of evidence* and then acting upon it. In this case, John has provided evidence for the full

deity of Jesus so that readers, whether in his age or ours, might believe it and commit their lives to Jesus as their Savior.

In John's Gospel we have an accurate record of things that were said and done in Palestine almost 2,000 years ago by a Jew named Jesus of Nazareth and that are presented to us as evidence for his extraordinary claims. If one will believe this and approach the record honestly with an open mind, God will use it to bring that person to fullness of faith in the Lord Jesus as God's Son and his Savior. This was John's purpose in writing his Gospel. It is my primary purpose in writing these studies.

What will happen in your case? It all depends on whether or not you open your mind to John's teaching. Sometime ago I was talking to a young man who was very critical of Christianity.

"Have you investigated the evidence?" I asked him.

"What do you mean? How does one do that?" he asked.

"Go home this week and begin to read John's Gospel," I answered. "But before you begin, take a moment to pray something like this: 'God, I do not know if you exist or, if you do, whether you hear me. But if you exist and if you hear me, I want you to know that I am an honest seeker after truth. If this Book of John can really speak to me and show me that Jesus is the Son of God and is God, I ask you to prove that to me while I read it. And if you prove it, then I will believe in him and serve him forever.'" I told him that if he did that, God would speak to him and that he would be convinced that all the things that are written about Jesus of Nazareth in this book are true and that he is the Son of God and our Savior.

The young man went home. I saw him a week later, and I asked, "Did you read the book?"

He answered, "Well, I have to admit that there are other things to which I give a higher priority." Here is another case. A Christian at the University of Pennsylvania entered into a series of Bible studies in John's Gospel with a young woman who was not a Christian. The two

young women went through several chapters where Jesus is declared many times to be God, but none of it clicked with the non-Christian. Suddenly, in the midst of a study of the third chapter of John, and after many weeks of study, the inquiring non-Christian exclaimed, "Why, I see it! Jesus Christ is *God! He* is God." That was the turning point, and several weeks later she became a Christian.

That is what we are looking for in the following studies of John's Gospel. Moreover, as that happens, we will also look for a strengthening and encouraging of believers in the service of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God and our Lord.

Chapter 2.
Jesus Christ Is God

John 1:1-2

What do you think of Jesus Christ? Who is he? According to Christianity this is the most important question you or anyone else will ever have to face. It is important because it is inescapable—you will have to answer it sooner or later, in this world or in the world to come—and because the quality of your life here and your eternal destiny depend upon your answer. Who is Jesus Christ? If he was only a man, then you can safely forget him. If he is God, as he claimed to be, and as all Christians believe, then you should yield your life to him. You should worship and serve him faithfully.

Four Gospels

If you are one who has never answered this question personally or if you have assumed (perhaps without much investigation) that Jesus was only a man, then the Gospel of John was written particularly for you. It was written for those who do not yet believe that Jesus Christ is God, to lead them to that conclusion.

I do not know which literary critic once said, "A novel without a purpose is like a life without a career. In order to be a story it must have something to say." But, whoever the author may have been, the statement itself is a correct one. What is more, it is as correct for biblical literature as it is for works by purely human authors. In one sense the Gospel of John has the same purpose as each of the other three Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. That is, John wishes to present to the reader the earthly life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew who was born under the reign of Herod the Great and who died when Pontius Pilate was the Roman procurator in Judea. In another sense, however, John has a purpose that is distinctly his own. That purpose is to show that Jesus Christ is God. That is his thesis.

To some extent, Matthew's Gospel portrays the Lord Jesus primarily as the Jewish Messiah. In fact, it is possible to argue that everything that goes into his account of Christ's life supports that theme. Mark's purpose is to reveal Jesus Christ as God's servant. Luke deals with Christ's humanity. John, however, reveals Jesus as the eternal, preexisting Son of God who became man in order to reveal the Father and to bring men access into eternal life through his historical death and literal resurrection. How do we know that? We know it because John says so. He writes, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31).

Arthur W. Pink, one of the great students of this Gospel, has written, "In this book we are shown that the one who was heralded by the angels to the Bethlehem shepherds, who walked this earth for thirty-three years, who was crucified at Calvary, who rose in triumph from the grave, and who forty days later departed from these scenes, was none other than the Lord of Glory. The evidence for this is overwhelming, the proofs almost without number, and the effect of contemplating them must be to bow our hearts in worship before 'the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ' (Titus 2:13)."

John's Thesis

It is not surprising, therefore, when we turn from the end of John's Gospel to the beginning, that we find John presenting there the thesis that Jesus Christ is God.

I think that John would have done very well in one of our universities today. When you write a paper in a university the best way to do it—although you can be more subtle than this—is to say in your opening paragraph what it is that you are setting out to prove, then prove it, and when you get to the end, sum it all up and say, "See, I did it. It's just what I said I would do at the beginning." That is exactly what John does. He starts out in the first two verses stating that Jesus Christ is God. He proves it in twenty-one chapters. Then, when he gets to the end he says that the things written in his book were written so that you and I, his readers, might know that Jesus Christ is God and that we might believe on him.

At the beginning he says, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning" (John 1:1, 2).* We know from verse 14 that the Word is Jesus, for in that verse John says that "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Thus, we find John to be saying that Jesus existed from the beginning, that he was with God in the beginning, and that he was God. In other words, the opening verses of the Gospel contain a full statement of Christ's divinity.

These verses teach three things about the divinity of Jesus Christ.

The first statement is that Jesus existed "in the beginning." In other words, Jesus was preexistent. He was "before" all things. There are several ways in which the phrase "in the beginning" is used in the Bible. In 1 John it is used of the beginning of Christ's earthly ministry. John writes, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life" (1 John 1:1). In the first verse of the Book of Genesis the phrase is used of

the beginning of creation: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The use of the phrase in John's Gospel goes beyond even that, however, for John says that when you begin to talk about Jesus Christ you can do so properly only when you go back beyond his earthly life—back beyond the beginnings of creation—into eternity. That is where Jesus Christ was.

Moreover, this is found wherever the Bible speaks in detail about Christ's person. The author of the Book of Hebrews looks back to the beginning when he says, *"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe"* (Heb. 1:1-2). The Book of Revelation reveals Jesus to be the "Alpha and Omega ... the First and the Last" (Rev. 1:8, 17). Paul writes that before Jesus became man he was "in very nature God" and had "equality with God" (Phil. 2:6). These statements all point to the preexistence of Jesus as one important aspect of his divinity.

The second statement is that Jesus Christ was *with* God. This is an affirmation of Christ's separate personality, and it is a very subtle statement. John wishes to say, and indeed he does say, that Jesus is fully God. He reports Jesus as saying, "anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). But John is aware also that the Trinity is involved here, that there is a diversity within the Godhead. Thus he also expresses this truth in his statement.

The final phrase is a declaration that Jesus is fully divine, for John says, "and the Word was
God," or literally, "and God was the Word." This means that everything that can be said about God the Father can be said about God the Son. In Jesus dwells all the wisdom, glory, power, love, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth of the Father. In him, God the Father is known. John then sums up his teaching by saying, "He was with God in the beginning"

(v. 2). With these words the highly emphatic and unequivocal statement of the full divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ is ended.

Knowledge of God

At this point we need some practical applications. What does it matter to say that Jesus Christ is God?

First, to say that Jesus Christ is God is to say that we can now know *the truth about God.* We can know what he is like. The counterpart to this statement is that apart from Jesus Christ we really cannot know him. Is God the god of Plato's imagination? We do not know. Is he the god of Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher? Is he the god of other philosophers? Is he the god of the mystics? The answer is that apart from Jesus Christ we do not know what God is like. But if Jesus Christ is God, then we do know, because to know the Lord Jesus Christ is to know God. There is no knowledge of God apart from a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and there is no knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ apart from a knowledge of the Bible.

One of the saddest stories in the Word of God concerns this theme. It is in John's Gospel. Toward the end of his ministry, Jesus explained carefully that he was going away from the disciples but that he was going to prepare a place for them and would one day return. The disciples were depressed at the thought of his leaving them. He went on to say that if they had really known him, they would have known the Father. At this point Philip, who was one of the disciples asked him, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us" (John 14:8). In other words, Philip was saying, "If I could just see God, I would be satisfied." How sad! The disciples had been with Jesus for almost three years and now were nearing the end of his ministry. Still they had not fully recognized that Jesus is God and that they were coming to know God through him. Jesus then had to answer by saying, *"Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"* (v. 9).

If you want to know what God is like, study the life of Jesus Christ. Read the Bible! The things recorded there of Jesus Christ are true. What is more, if you read them, you will find that the Holy Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of truth, will interpret and explain them to you.

Always Like Jesus

The second practical application of the truth that Jesus Christ is God is that God was always like Jesus. William Barclay, who knew this truth, writes, "If the Word was with God before time began, if God's Word is part of the eternal scheme of things, it means that God was always like Jesus. Sometimes we tend to think of God as just and holy and stern and avenging; and we tend to think that something that Jesus did changed God's anger into love, and altered God's attitude to men. The New Testament knows nothing of that idea. The whole New Testament tells us, and this passage of John especially tells us, that God has always been like Jesus."

Does Jesus Christ hate sin? Yes! So God has always hated sin also. Does Jesus Christ love the sinner? Yes! Therefore, God loves him also. Barclay says, "What Jesus did was to open a window in time that we might see the eternal and unchanging love of God." In fact, God so hates sin and so loves the sinner that in eternity he planned the way in which he would redeem the race. We read the Old Testament and we find God saying, "There *must be* an atonement for sin." We read the accounts of Christ's life and death, and we find God saying, "There *is* the atonement for sin." We come to our time and as the Word of God is preached we find God speaking to our hearts and saying, 'That *was* the atonement for sin. Believe it and be saved." God has always been like Jesus.

An Acceptable Sacrifice

Third, the truth that Jesus Christ is God means that his death on the cross was significant. It means that in this way he himself became the one sufficient and acceptable sacrifice for man's sin. If you or I were to be so foolish as to make a statement that we would die for another

man's sins and then were somehow to lose our lives, in terms of sin our death would mean nothing. We are sinners. If we were to die for sin, or pretend to do it, the only sin we could die for would be our own. But Jesus had no sin. Being God, he is sinless. Hence, when he died, he died for the sins of others, in their place; he removed forever the burden of sin from those who believe on him.

Finally, because Jesus Christ is God, it means that he is able to satisfy all the needs of your heart. God is infinite. Jesus is also infinite. Therefore he is able to satisfy *you* out of that inexhaustible immensity.

There is a story that illustrates this truth. Do you remember the verses in Ephesians in which Paul prays that the Christians to whom he is writing might *"have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God"* (Eph. 3:18-19)? These verses speak of the four dimensions of God's love—breadth, length, depth, and height—and they say that out of that fullness God is able to satisfy the one who comes to him. During the Napoleonic period in Europe some of the emperor's soldiers opened a prison that had been used by the Spanish Inquisition. There were many dungeons in the prison, but in one of them the soldiers found something particularly interesting. They found the remains of a prisoner, the flesh and clothing all long since gone and only an ankle bone in a chain to tell his story. On the wall, however, carved into the stone with some sharp piece of metal, there was a crude cross. And around the cross were the Spanish words for the four dimensions of Ephesians 3:18-19.
Above was the word "height." Below was the word "depth." On one side there was the word "breadth." On the other there was the word "length." Clearly, as this poor, persecuted soul was lying in chains and was dying, he comforted himself with the thought that God who in himself contains the breadth, length, depth, and height of all things was able to satisfy him fully. He is able to satisfy you fully whatever your need or your longing.

"Who Is This?"

This is John's thesis. We are going to see the evidence for it as we go on in these studies. But even here we must raise the question with which we began and which is above all questions: What do you think of Jesus Christ? Who is he?

This was the question that was raised all through Christ's earthly ministry. When Jesus rode into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey on what we call Palm Sunday the people turned to one another and asked, "Who is this?" (Matt. 21:10). The disciples asked the question after Jesus had stilled the storm on the Lake of Galilee: "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:41). Herod asked, "I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?" (Luke 9:9). When Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic, the scribes and Pharisees asked themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Luke 5:21).

This is the question. Is Jesus only a man? If he is, you can afford to forget him. Or is he God? If he is God, then he demands your belief and your total allegiance. Do you believe that Jesus is God? You should be able to say with doubting Thomas, in the story that is really the spiritual climax of the fourth Gospel, "My Lord and my God." To draw back from making that confession is to perish. To believe it is to enter into eternal life.

Chapter 3.
Jesus Christ Is Man

John 1:1, 14

The last study looked at the first two verses of John's Gospel, the verses that declare so unequivocably that Jesus is God. We now want to skip ahead to the verse that goes with them and that says in equally certain terms that Jesus is man. That verse is John 1:14. 'The Word became

flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus is God. Jesus is man. Properly understood, these are the two most important truths to be made about Christ's person.

A Biblical Doctrine

It is not only in John's Gospel that we encounter such teaching, of course. These themes are found throughout Scripture. What is more, although they are very profound they are taught in the most natural way and in a totally artless manner.

Take the three places where God the Father describes the Son's nature by means of two complementary verbs. In the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah, in a verse that is always much quoted at Christmastime, we read, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). This verse teaches that the Messiah was to be One who was always God's Son but who would become man at a particular point in history. Hence, as a child he is *born*, but as a Son he is *given.* In Romans 1:3-4 the same teaching occurs. There the apostle Paul writes, "... regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead. "Jesus was *made* the seed of David, according to the flesh. But he was *declared* always to have been God's Son. Finally, in Galatians 4:4-5 we read, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." As a son, Jesus Christ was *sent.* Hence, he was always God. Nevertheless, he was *made* under the law. He became man. The Bible is never hesitant to put the twin truths of the full deity and the true humanity of Jesus Christ together.

What we have taught didactically in these verses is also taught by illustration in various events in Christ's ministry. For instance, in the next chapter of John's Gospel we find the Lord Jesus Christ at a

wedding (John 2:1-11). Few things could be more truly human than that. Yet, when the wine is exhausted and the family about to be embarrassed, Jesus makes new and better wine of the water that had been standing around in the great stone water-pots that were used for the Jewish washings and purifications. Nothing in the whole chapter is more clearly divine.

On another occasion the disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee from Capernaum to the land of the Gadarenes while Jesus, who was exhausted from the day's activities, was asleep in the boat. A storm arose that was so intense it frightened even these seasoned fishermen. They awoke Jesus, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" And Jesus stilled the storm. What could be more human than our Lord's total exhaustion in the boat? But what could be more divine than his stilling of the winds and waves, so that the disciples came to worship him saying, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" (Matt. 8:23-27)? The same twofold nature of the Lord Jesus Christ is illustrated throughout the Gospels right down to the accounts of his death and resurrection. Nothing could be more human than his death by crucifixion. Nothing could be more divine than the darkening of the sky, the tearing of the veil of the temple, the opening of the graves of the saints buried near Jerusalem, and the final triumphant rending of the tomb on that first Easter morning.

We must not make the mistake of thinking of Jesus as being merely a divine man or, on the other hand, of being merely a human God. Jesus is the God-man; and this means that he is fully and uniquely God as well as being perfectly man. He is God with us, God for us, God in us. As man he is the One who has experienced all the trials, joys, sufferings, losses, gains, temptations, and vicissitudes of this life. All this is involved in these two important verses of John 1.

Able to Die

Why are these truths important? Or, more particularly, since we discussed the divinity of Jesus Christ in our previous study, why is the humanity of Jesus Christ important? There are several reasons.

First, the incarnation made it possible for Jesus Christ to die. This is easy to see. It is what the author of Hebrews is thinking of when he writes, "Because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, "Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God"'" (Heb. 10:4-7). A body made it possible for Jesus Christ to die.

It is always difficult to find an adequate illustration of the incarnation itself. But it is not so hard to find an illustration of this aspect of it. A body was the vehicle of Christ's earthly ministry. Take a man who is called by God to do medical missionary work in a distant corner of Africa. His person and his willingness are one thing. But his training is another. Thus, the man will submit to years of training, gaining medical knowledge and at times even a bit of seminary training, so that to his person and original intention he adds that which is necessary for him to do the work. It is exactly what Jesus Christ did. In the beginning, in the eternal counsels of God, before there was a world or a lost race of men, Jesus foresaw all human history and knew that he was to redeem the race. Thus, in the fullness of time, in the days of Herod, he assumed a body so that he could offer up that body as the perfect sacrifice for man's sin.

This is what we find throughout Scripture. The very name "Jesus" looks forward to an act of saving significance. For the angel said of Mary, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Jesus himself spoke of the suffering that was to come (Mark 8:31; 9:31), linking the success of his mission to the crucifixion: "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself (John 12:32). At several places in John's Gospel the crucifixion is spoken of as that vital "time" for which Christ came and to which his ministry inflexibly proceeded (John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 13:1; 17:1).

Moreover, the death of Jesus is in a real sense the theme of the Old Testament also. The Old Testament sacrifices prefigure Christ's suffering, and the prophets explicitly foretell it. Paul teaches that Abraham was saved by faith in Christ (Gal. 3:8, 16). Jesus taught the downcast Emmaus disciples that the Old Testament foretold his death and resurrection: "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself (Luke 24:27). In the light of these texts it is not wrong to say that the most important reason for the incarnation of Jesus is that it made it possible for him to die. This death was the focal point of world and biblical history.

Able to Understand

There is also a second reason why it was important for the eternal Son of God to become man. The fact that Jesus Christ took upon himself all that men are and know and experience also made it possible for him to be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, as the author of Hebrews says. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16). Jesus knew and experienced (in a way that we can understand) what it meant to be man.

J. B. Phillips, the translator who stands behind one of the modern paraphrases of the New Testament and some of the Old Testament books, tells how he was impressed with the deeply human nature of Christ's sufferings as he went about his task of translating the Gospels. He says, "The record of the behaviour of Jesus on the way to the cross and of the crucifixion itself is almost unbearable, chiefly because it is so intensely *human.* If, as I believe, this was indeed God focused in a human being, we can see for ourselves that here is no play acting; this is the real thing. There are no supernatural advantages for this man. No celestial rescue party delivered Him from the power of evil men, and His agony was not mitigated by any superhuman anaesthetic. We can

only guess what frightful anguish of mind and spirit wrung from him the terrible words 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' But the cry 'It is finished!' cannot be one of despair. It does not even mean 'It is all over.' It means 'It has been completed'—and the terrifying task of doing God's will to the bitter end had been fully and finally accomplished."

It is this suffering that enables us to know that Jesus experienced all that we experience—the weariness, disappointments, misunderstandings, and the pain of this life—and so is able to understand and help all those who are his own and are so tempted.

Our Example

Third, by becoming man Jesus has also provided us with an example of how the life that is fully pleasing to the Father should be lived. Being what we are, this is most important.

I often have been asked by people who are concerned with the state of the church today why it is that so many of the young men who go to seminary (even a good seminary, for that matter) come out of it without much of a message and without much of an ability to lead the churches they eventually serve. This is good questioning. As I have thought about it, I have come to feel that one of the main reasons is that they lack an adequate example of what the Christian ministry can be. They have never had contact with a strong church or with an intelligent preaching ministry that is Bible-centered and faithful to the great themes of the gospel. So, lacking an example, they wander about in their approach and fail to provide strong leadership.

Now, what is true for the ministry is true for other fields also—business, law, medicine, scholarship, and so on—and it is true spiritually. Thus, Jesus became man in order to go through all sorts of situations with all sorts of people in order that we might be provided with a pattern upon which our Christian life can be constructed.

Do you remember ever having seen a sampler? I mean those patterns of needlework containing the alphabet by which children of a generation or two ago used to learn to read and write. That is what Christ is for us. He is our sampler, our example. We are to pattern our attempts to write out the Christian life on him. I find it interesting that Peter uses the word for "sampler" or
"copybook" when he says, "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). In other words, by means of Jesus Christ's becoming man God wrote the characters of love and righteousness large so that we by his grace might copy them.

The Value of Life

The fourth reason why the incarnation was important is that through it God sanctified the value of human life in a way that had not been done previously. Before the coming of Jesus Christ, life in the ancient world was cheap; and it seems that, with the departure from biblical values and biblical principles that we see about us, life is becoming increasingly cheap today.

What makes life cheap? War makes it cheap. There is plenty of war today. The continuing reports of battle deaths numb us as to the destiny of the individual. The same thing is true of traffic deaths or deaths as the result of crime. Moreover, I personally believe that the laws that have legalized abortion have also had this effect and will have it increasingly in years ahead.

What will offset this cheapening of human life? Only the values that Christianity brings! Christianity values life, first, because God gave it and, second, because the Lord Jesus Christ sanctified it by assuming a full human nature by means of the incarnation. Jesus Christ became like you.

Does that mean anything to you personally? It should make you thankful. It should lead you to bow down before the Lord Jesus Christ and worship him deeply as your Savior. Martin Luther was a great

expositor of John's Gospel, as I mentioned in the opening chapter, and at this point in his commentary he tells a story from folklore that illustrates this principle. He says that there was once a stubborn and unspiritual man—Luther called him "a coarse and brutal lout"—who showed absolutely no reverence for any of the great truths of Christianity. When the words "And was made man" were sung in church, this man neither crossed himself nor removed his hat, both of which were common practice in the Roman church of that day. When the creeds were recited the man would not kneel. Luther says, "Then the devil stepped up to him and hit him so hard it made his head spin. He [the devil] cursed him gruesomely and said: 'May hell consume you. ...If God had become an angel like me and the congregation sang: "God was made an angel," I would bend not only my knees but my whole body to the ground! ...And you vile human creature, you stand there like a stick or a stone. You hear that God did not become an angel but a man like you, and you just stand there like a stick of wood!' " The story is fictional, of course. Yet it does make the point. Apart from the grace of God we all stand before the most tremendous truths of God's Word as impervious blocks of stone. Yet we should respond to them.

Do we respond? Do you? You should lift up your heart and also your voice in praise of a God who can come from the infinite distance and glories of heaven down to a world such as ours in order that he might redeem us and lead us back to himself. The incarnation is the second greatest truth in the Bible. The greatest is that this God who became man could also love us enough to go to the cross and die for us personally.

Chapter 4.
God Has Spoken

John 1:1-3

Toward the end of his short but valuable book, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*,
Professor John Baillie of Edinburgh University, Scotland, tells of a complaint he once received about Christianity. The man making the complaint was a legal representative of one of the American universities. He said, "You speak of trusting God, of praying to him, and doing his will. But it's all so one-sided. We speak to God, we bow down before him and lift up our hearts to him. But he never speaks to us. He makes no sign."

The man who spoke these words was wrong in his viewpoint, of course, as true Christians know and as Professor Baillie points out. Still he was speaking for millions of people who would like to have a sure word from God but who have not heard it and doubt that God has spoken. God has spoken, but they have not heard him. Thus, they consider the heavens to be silent and God to be unconcerned.

The problem would not be so bad from man's viewpoint if he were not curious. But men are curious. They want to know. A man begins to hunt out knowledge as a child, examining his surroundings. As he grows older his surroundings grow larger, but still he retains his curiosity. Some men devise theories to explain the phenomena that they and others have observed. Some devise myths or philosophies or make scientific statements to explain the workings of the natural world. Some observe the sky by eyesight; others build telescopes. Still others send space probes to investigate what even their best telescopes are unable to reveal to them. Man is always exploring, questioning, trying to understand. He never grows out of the child's questioning "Why?"
It is the same in the spiritual life. Man has always wanted to know about God and to understand his purposes with men. The universality and diversity of the world's religions prove this. But when we turn our minds to God, apart from God's self-revelation, our minds are baffled. We can devise theories, but in the realm of metaphysics there is no data on which to operate. Men see effects, but they cannot see the cause. They see natural phenomena, but they cannot observe the phenomena of the spiritual world. The Reformers observed this and were led to speak

of the *deus absconditus,* the hidden God. They knew that man is finite and sinful and that no exercise of will, no stretching of his mind will lift him up the towering ladder of understanding to explore the mind of God.

The Bible also recognizes this. One of Job's comforters asks, "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7). The answer is that this is impossible. Thus, men would forever remain in ignorance, were God not to take steps to disclose himself to man. A motion picture by Ingmar Bergman of Sweden speaks about half of this problem. It is called *The Silence.* It portrays the plight of three characters who do not hear the voice of God and who believe that God is silent. The truth, however, is that God is not silent. God has spoken. And he has spoken in terms that are perfectly clear and that, therefore, remove all human excuses for failing to know and worship him.

The *Logos*

This leads to a study of one of the most important words in the opening chapter of John's Gospel.
We have already mentioned it several times in the preceding studies. In English it is the word "word" itself. In Greek it is the word *logos*. It occurs in verses 1 and 14. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." This term refers to Jesus Christ, for he is the one who became flesh and dwelt among men. Still we must ask (and indeed biblical scholars have been asking ever since the Gospel was written), why is Jesus Christ called "The Word"? What is the significance of this title? The answer has to do with God's revealing of himself.

To understand this term, we need to ask what meaning it would have had for those to whom the Gospel of John was first written. For instance, what meaning would it have had for a person of Jewish background who was just beginning to hear and understand the gospel?

The first verses of this Gospel, including the term "Word," would refer a Jewish person to the first words of the Book of Genesis where we are told that in the beginning God spoke and all things came into being. In other words, to the Jewish mind Jesus would somehow be associated with the creative power of God and with the self-disclosure of God in creation. We can get a feeling for what this would have meant to a Jew by imagining ourselves to be reading a book that began "When in the course of human events" and included the words "self-evident" and "inalienable rights." Clearly the author would be trying to remind us of the Declaration of Independence and of the founding principles of the American republic.

We need to add to this, however, that the idea of "word" would also have meant more to a Jewish mind than it does to us today. To the Jew a word was something concrete, something much closer to what we would call an event or a deed. A word spoken was a deed done. This way of thinking resulted from the Jew's Old Testament theology. What happens when God speaks? The answer is that the thing is instantly done. God said, "Let there be light," and there was light (Gen. 1:3). God said, "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:11). Thus, the Jew would be somewhat prepared for the thought that the Word of God could somehow be seen and touched as well as heard and that the "Word" might somehow find expression in a life. It would not be entirely strange for a Jew to learn, as the author of Hebrews puts it, that "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:1-2).

In a very brief way, then, we have seen what the description of Jesus Christ as the "Word" might have meant to a Jew. But we must remember that the Jews were not the only ones who would be reading John's Gospel. The Gospel would also be read by Greeks and by those who spoke Greek and were influenced by Greek thought. What would the word *logos* mean to them?

For the Greeks, the answer to this question is found, not in religion but in philosophy. Almost 2,600 years ago, in the sixth century B.C., a philosopher by the name of Heraclitus lived in Ephesus. He was the man who said that it is impossible to step into the same river twice. He meant that all of life is in a state of change. Thus, although you step into the river once, step out, and then step in a second time, by the time you have taken the second step the water has flowed on and it is a different river. To Heraclitus, and to the philosophers who followed him, all of life seemed like that. But, they asked, "If that be so, how is it that everything that exists is not in a state of perpetual chaos?" Heraclitus answered that life is not a chaos because the change that we see is not mere random change. It is ordered change. And this means that there must be a divine "reason" or "word" that controls it. This is the *logos*, the word that John uses in the opening verse of his Gospel.

However the *logos* also meant more than this to Heraclitus. For once he had discovered, as he thought, that the controlling principle of matter was God's *logos*, then it was only a small step for him to apply it also to all the events of history and to the mental order that rules in the minds of men. For Heraclitus, then, the *Logos* became nothing less than the mind of God controlling this world and all men.

By the time John came to write his Gospel, the age of Heraclitus was nearly seven hundred years in the past. But the ideas of Heraclitus had been so formative for Greek thought that they had survived, not only in his own philosophy but also in the philosophy of Plato and Socrates, the Stoics, and others who had built upon it. They were discussed by many persons much as we discuss the atomic theory or evolution today. The Greeks knew all about the *Logos*. Therefore, it was with a stroke of divine genius that John seized upon this word, one that was as meaningful to the Greeks as it was to the Jewish people, and said by means of it, "Listen, you Greeks, the very thing that has most occupied your philosophical thought and about which you have all been writing for centuries—the *Logos* of God, this word, this controlling power of the universe and of man's mind—this has come to earth as a man and we have seen him."

Plato, we are told, once turned to that little group of philosophers and students that had gathered around him during the Greek Golden Age in Athens and said to his followers, "It may be that some day there will come forth from God a Word, a *Logos*, who will reveal all mysteries and make everything plain." Now John is saying, "Yes, Plato, and the *Logos* has come; now God is revealed to us perfectly."

Do you believe it? John is declaring that the unknown God of the Greeks, the hidden God of the Middle Ages, the silent God of the twentieth century, is neither unknown, hidden, nor silent. He is fully revealed in Jesus. "It is true that no one has ever seen God at any time. Yet the divine and only Son, Who lives in the closest intimacy with the Father, has made Him known" (John 1:18 PHILLIPS).

A Previous Revelation

This is a natural stopping point for our study, of course, but we cannot really stop here. For the point John is making is not only that Jesus is the revelation of God, but that Jesus was always active in revealing God. Hence, even before the incarnation, there was no excuse for failing to believe.

This is seen first of all in the emphasis John places upon Christ's role in creation. Creation reveals God, and Jesus was God's agent in creation. Thus, John can say, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (v. 3). What has God revealed about himself in creation? Paul answers by saying, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). This means that when Jesus Christ began by revealing God in creation he revealed him in two important aspects—his existence and his power—and that these are sufficient to condemn all men for their failure to bow down and worship him.

We know the force of this verse from things in our own experience. When we see a leaf blowing down the street, we do not attribute powers

of self-motivation to the leaf. We assume that a power equal to the effect is behind the leaf and has put it in motion. We call that power wind. When we examine a watch of fine Swiss workmanship, we do not assume that the steel and glass and small bearings possess the ability of organizing themselves into a watch. We posit the existence of a watchmaker. So it should be in the realm of nature. Jesus intended that we should recognize God's existence and power through nature.

But nature is not enough. For one thing, no one has ever come to an obedient faith in the God of creation through nature. For another, the revelation of God in nature is not specific in terms of God's plans, and it is not personal. Hence, Jesus Christ was also active in revealing God through Scripture. It may be true that God has revealed his existence and his power in nature, but it is equally true that this is all he has revealed there. Men may recognize the power of God, but if they would know his plans, they must consult the Bible.

You will remember that when the apostle Paul preached the gospel to the men of Athens, he preached to men who had the knowledge of God through nature but did not know who he was. An altar in Athens was inscribed, "To the unknown God." Other altars that have been discovered since are even more indefinite; they say, "To whomever it may concern." How wonderful that this form of address need never be made by anyone. For Paul, who was instructed in the Scriptures and knew the God whom the Greeks worshiped ignorantly, proclaimed, "Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23). He went on to show that God, the creator of the world, was no blind deity, to be worshiped blindly, but a personal God who has willed that all men should live in harmony with one another and come to know and worship him. "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (v. 30).

The First and the Last

Preeminently, however, Jesus has revealed God through the incarnation, and it is there that God is known personally. God has spoken to men

indirectly through his creation and directly through the Scriptures, but there is a more wonderful truth than this. God has spoken to man personally through Jesus Christ. Jesus is his best and greatest word to lost men. If we know God's power in creation and his plans in the Scriptures, we know his personality in the Son. As we look to Jesus we see God himself. "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." We discover a God of infinite love and perfect holiness, possessing a desire wonderful enough and a power adequate enough to save rebellious men and women from sin.

Do you believe that? Have you found the fullness of God's glory in Jesus? If you have not yet found it, let me caution you that Jesus is not only the first and most important and all-inclusive word of the Father, he is also God's last word. You will not find God apart from him. If you do not receive him, the last word you will hear from him will be the word of your judgment. Jesus said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End" (Rev. 22:13). He will either say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Matt. 25:34), or he will declare, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matt. 7:23).

Chapter 5.
Jesus Christ Is Life

John 1:4

In this verse John introduces two of the greatest themes of his narrative. Often at the beginning of an important work of literature or music, a writer or composer will declare a theme and then allow it to recur again and again throughout the book or composition. This is sometimes done through a visual image, as in a Hardy novel. Sometimes it is through a musical motif, as in a Beethoven symphony. Sometimes it is done by means of a word or a concept, as we have here. John's themes are "light" and "life." And they occur in such a variety of contexts and so

frequently that we need to take some time to examine them at the outset.

In this study we will look at the claim that Jesus is the *life* of the world. In the next study we will look at the claim that he is the *light.*

A Prominent Theme

It is quite obvious to any careful reader of the Gospel that the word "life" is an important one, for John speaks often of life in connection with Jesus Christ and of the eternal life that he offered and, indeed, still offers to men and women.

To some extent the Gospel begins and ends with this theme. John begins by declaring, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (1:4). In 20:30-31, he concludes," Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." In John 14:6 Jesus declares that he is the source of life: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 5:40 shows that men will not come to him that they might have life. In John 10:28 Jesus says of those who do come, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." John 10:10 says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." In all, the word "life" occurs more than thirty-five times in the Gospel. And the related verb "to live" increases that total by at least fifteen more instances.

Physical Life

But what does it mean to say that Jesus is the source of life or that he is the life? The first answer to that question is one that takes us back to the opening pages of the Book of Genesis and therefore to the role of the Lord Jesus Christ in giving life to all living things in the world. We have already seen in our previous studies that the writer intends a

reference to the first chapters of Genesis in his introductory verses; this is also the case here. "In the beginning" (v. 1) reminds us of the sentence: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). The *Logos* or "Word" of God reminds us of the way in which God spoke in creation: "And God said,
'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). In the same way, when John says of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life" (John 1:3, 4), every Bible student should think instantly of the life that went forth out of God to bring life to inanimate matter at the beginning of the creation of the world. In other words, John is saying that our physical life comes from God through the Lord Jesus.

This is suggested in the early chapters of Genesis. For we read that "the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7).

All the terms in this verse from Genesis are important. In the first place, we are told that God formed man of the dust of the earth. Once, in a message on Christ's statement that we are the salt of the earth, I pointed out that when God does a work in human history he uses common substances or common people so that the glory might be to his name and not to man's. We see this in his choice of Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, Mary and Joseph, John the Baptist, and the disciples to do certain things. We have it stated in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise... so that no one may boast before him." We have the same principle in the opening chapters of the Bible.

When God formed man, what did he use? Did he use gold, silver, iron, uranium, platinum? No, he used dust—a common substance. But he breathed into it the breath of his life. Thus, even though we may be "fearfully and wonderfully made," as the psalmist says (Ps. 139:14), nevertheless, the glory is God's and there is nothing in us about which

man can boast. "So low is the dust," writes Donald Grey Barnhouse in *Genesis*, "that God gave it to the serpent for the food of his curse. Job uses the word twenty times to describe the littleness of man in his misery. It is to dust that all bodies return in death. But we can look up to the Lord in confidence because 'he knows our frame and he remembers that we are dust' (Ps. 103:14, RSV)." The writer then adds, "Dust that exalts itself is hateful, but dust that acknowledges its dustiness finds favor in the sight of the Lord."

There is a lesson for us in the dust; but we must stop our examination of the verse at this point, because for our present exposition of John 1:4 the important term in Genesis 2:7 is "breath." It is the breath of God that makes the dust live.

What is God's breath? It is that which goes forth out of his mouth. It is his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, and it is associated with his spoken word. When we speak about these three terms in English— breath, Spirit, and word—they seem to be unrelated. But this is not true in the Hebrew language. In Hebrew the same word that is used for Spirit is also used for "breath." It is the word *ruach*, which even has a breathy sound. And what is more significant, in Hebrew thought the breath of God or the breath of a man is associated with the person's spoken words. For a man speaks, as we know, by means of it. When we put these ideas together, we find that God brought forth life in man by speaking the word of life (which John has already identified with Jesus Christ) in such a way that the Spirit of life (which is his Holy Spirit) passes into man and causes him to breathe. In other words, these terms provide an illustration of the role of each member of the Trinity in creation.

The significance of man's created nature is seen most clearly when he is contrasted with the Lord Jesus Christ. In the great resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, there is a verse toward the end that says, ""The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit" (v. 45). In other words, even though we live by the breath of God, we do so only by inhaling. Christ lives by exhaling. Thus, we know that we are his creatures and that he is the Creator.

Spiritual Life

However, this is only the beginning of our understanding of what John intends by the use of the word "life" in the Gospel. He is speaking of Christ's role in creation, in one sense. But this is only the groundwork for the spiritual interpretation of the word that he unfolds in the pages of the Gospel. It is true that John speaks of physical life here, but as the book goes on he speaks increasingly of spiritual life. And the point is that just as Jesus is the source of physical life, so is he the source of the spiritual life that we receive when we believe on him.

To appreciate the importance of the gift of spiritual life, we must realize first that apart from it we are dead spiritually. Or you might say, we are as unresponsive to God as was the dust of the earth before God breathed his Spirit into it.

We can say this, of course, because God says it. Take the verses from the second chapter of Ephesians for an example. Here Paul writes to the Christians at Ephesus, reminding them that before God made them alive they were totally dead in everything spiritual and were in rebellion against him. "As for you, *you were dead* in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, *made us alive* with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:1-6).

What a past is described in these verses! And what a condition! In our natural state we can do nothing to improve ourselves spiritually. Apart from Christ no man has ever breathed one breath toward God, nor had one spiritual heartbeat. Man is dead in sin. He needs a new life. That is

why we must be born again. Being born again means receiving a new life from God through the Lord Jesus Christ by faith in him.

One might add here, however, that when the Bible declares that all men are dead spiritually, it does not imply that all are in an identical state of corruption. In his book, *In the Heavenlies*, Harry A. Ironside points to three instances in the life of Christ that illustrate clearly what the Bible is saying. He writes, "The beautiful little maid, the daughter of Jairus, had been dead only a few minutes when the blessed Lord reached her father's house, but she was dead, she was lifeless. Fair to look upon, lovely and sweet, no doubt, in the eyes of her beloved parents, like a beautiful marble statue, but although there was not the corruption that there might have been, she was dead nevertheless. Turn over to Luke's gospel and you find that as the blessed Lord came to the village of Nain they were carrying a young man out to bury him. He was dead. Dead perhaps a day or two. ...This young man was dead longer than the little maid, but life was just as truly extinct in her case as in his. Then you have the blessed Lord at the grave of Lazarus. The sisters told Him not to roll the stone away, for their brother had been dead four days and would already be offensive. Corruption had set in, but the Lord Jesus brought new life to that man" as well as to the others. In the same way, we are all genuinely dead apart from the life-giving Spirit of Jesus Christ. There may be degrees of corruption so that relatively speaking some men are far less offensive than others. But all men are dead spiritually. All need the divine life. Where does it come from? It comes from Jesus Christ. He is the life of the world. Because we were dead in our sins, God sent Jesus Christ to give us new life. Because we were guilty of sin, God sent Jesus to be the propitiation for our sins by bearing them in his own body on the tree.

Eternal Life

There are two more truths that should be noticed before concluding this study. First, the life that God gives through Jesus Christ is not merely an earthly life or a life of such quality that it can be lost, but *eternal* life. It can never be lost. Thus the life that we receive from God in the moment

of our belief in Jesus Christ is the same life that we will be living with God in eternity in what we would call unending millions of years from now.

What is eternal life? It is life without end, the life of God. If it could be lost, as some persons think is the case, then it would not be eternal life. For instance, what would eternal life be if it could be lost at the end of one million years? It would not be eternal life. It would be onemillion-years life. But if God said that it was going to last for one million years, then it could not be lost before the expiration of that period. If God said that he was going to give us onethousand-years life, then the life could not be lost before the end of one thousand years. If he said that it was one hundred-years life, it could not be lost before one hundred years had expired. But we thank God that he has not given us merely one-hundred-, one-thousand-, or even one-million years life. He has given us eternal life. It is truly eternal or everlasting. Thus, the apostle John writes, "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:11).

The second truth is that God has not only given us eternal life (which no one can take from us); he has also given us a life that is meant to be abundant even in our present circumstances. The Lord Jesus Christ once said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

It is unfortunate that many Christians, though they have eternal life, nevertheless do not have life abundantly. This was not meant to be. Instead of living a miserable life and always complaining, Christians are meant to live lives of such joy and exuberance that their lives will be a blessing to others.

There is a magnificent picture of this abundant life in the first verses of the beloved Twenty-third Psalm. *"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake"* (Ps. 23:1-3). I believe that the reason this psalm has been so beloved by Christians throughout all the ages of

church history is that it sets forth as something quite practical the abundant life that is ours because of God's care for us. We know that we were once sheep that were lost. Even now we wander away from Christ's fold. But still we are his, and we know that the abundant life is ours whenever we will leave our wandering and lie down in the company of our Shepherd.

Did you know that a sheep will not eat or drink when it is lying down? Most people have never heard this. But it is a fact, and it gives special meaning to the phrase, "He makes me lie down in green pastures." If a sheep is lying down, even in the greenest of pastures and even with the most tender morsel of grass within an inch of its nose, the sheep will not eat the grass. Instead, if it is hungry, it will scramble to its feet, bend over, and then eat the morsel that was much easier to reach before. Thus, when the psalm tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ, our Shepherd, makes us lie down in green pastures, it means that he is able to satisfy us so completely that we cannot possibly yearn for anything more.

Oh, the joys of living out the abundant life of Christ! They are the joys of increasingly finding him to be the bread of life that satisfies all our hunger and the water of life that quenches our deepest thirst.

Chapter 6.
The Light of the World

John 1:4-5

Several years ago an old woman in the bush country of southern Rhodesia in Africa said to a missionary, "You have brought us the light, but we don't seem to want it. You have brought us the light, but we still walk in darkness." She was speaking only of the life she knew in Africa. But her words aptly describe the reaction of people everywhere to the light of Jesus Christ when he first shone upon the world. He was the light of the world. In one sense he had always been the light of the

world. Yet, when he appeared the world rejected him because it preferred darkness.

This great image—the image of Christ as the light of the world—is the second theme that John the evangelist introduces in the fourth and fifth verses of his opening chapter. Later we are told quite pointedly by Jesus, "I am the light of the world" (8:12). Here we read, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it."

God Is Light

What does John mean when he declares that Jesus Christ is the light of men? By this title, Jesus is revealed as the One who knows God the Father and who makes him known. Light is a universal image for the illumination of the mind through understanding. Before Christ came into the world, the world was in darkness. The world did not know God. Christ came. His light shone before men. Then men had light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The context for the significance of this image lies in the fact that God is pictured as light throughout the Old and New Testaments. David writes in one psalm, "The LORD is my light and my salvation" (Ps. 27:1). Psalm 36:9 says, "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light." Another psalm says: "Praise the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty. He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent" (Ps. 104:1-2). John writes, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

God is light! We recognize this truth personally every time we sing some of our most beautiful hymns:

> Eternal light! Eternal light!
> How pure the soul must be
> When, placed within Thy
> searching light, It shrinks

not, but with calm delight
Can live, and look on
Thee!

Or this great hymn by Walter Chalmers Smith:

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient
of Days, Almighty, victorious, Thy great
name we praise.

How perfect the image seems to be! And how appropriate as a term for the One who makes the Father known! E. M. Blaiklock, former professor of classics at Auckland University in New Zealand, makes these comments: "God is light. The image is satisfyingly complete. Light penetrates the unimaginable depths of space, far beyond the limits of human vision. In all the vastness of the great globe of vanished millennia into which the telescope can probe, the gleaming galaxies float, or tell in light how once they floated, when the effulgence which we see today began its endless journey.

"Without light there is no vision, no view of reality, no confident journeying, no growth save of chill and evil things, no health, no life. The hand shrinks from the cold and slimy life which survives sluggishly in dark caves. When some plant of the open day strikes root in such places, it becomes a pale and flaccid thing distorted beyond recognition, as it reaches for a gleam through some chink or crevice in the rock.

"But light, like God, exists by itself, apart from that which it illuminates. ...Light on earth is a medium, a means by which we see this and that object. It picks up and reveals the loveliness of shape and color. But light exists by itself and apart from that which it gilds and glorifies. It is an environment, a condition, a wonder which fills and floods the whole immensity of space."

Blaiklock is right. The image is rich, and it is totally appropriate to describe the Lord Jesus Christ. God the Father is light. So also is Christ

the Son. He is the image of the invisible God, the One who fills all in all. In him we see and know the Father.

Light and Darkness

The image also teaches that by his coming into the world Jesus exposed the works of darkness. For he shone in the darkness, and the darkness did not like it. B. F. Westcott, in *The Revelation of the Father,* has written, "The light which reveals the world does not make the darkness, but it makes the darkness felt. If the sun is hidden, all is shadow, though we call that shadow only which is contrasted with the sunlight; for the contrast seems to intensify that which is, however, left just what it was before. And this is what Christ has done by his coming. He stands before the world in perfect purity, and we must feel as men could not feel before he came, the imperfection, the impurity of the world. The line of separation is drawn forever, and the conscience of men acknowledges that it is rightly drawn. Whether we know it or not the light which streams from Christ is ever opening the way to a clearer distinction between good and evil. His coming is a judgment. The light and the darkness are not blended in him, as they are in us, so that opinion can be doubtful."

The coming of Jesus into the world exposed the world's darkness, even where men thought they had most light. When I was very young I spent a number of summers at a Christian camp in Canada. At this camp during the course of each summer my friends and I took several camping trips. The trips were fun, as I remember, but the sleeping conditions were not. The ground was hard. Often it was damp and cold. Sometimes it rained. I remember often lying awake for most of the night talking or fooling around with the other campers. During a particularly long night we would play with our flashlights. We would shine them in one another's eyes, and the game was to see which was the brightest. Generally, the one with the brightest reflector or the largest number of batteries won. Of course, the game could be played only in the dark, for eventually the sun came up, and after that the

differences between the flashlights faded into insignificance by comparison to the strong light of the sun.

That is the experience people have when they come face-to-face with Jesus Christ. So long as we live in the darkness of this world you and I are able to compare the relative merits of human goodness or righteousness. We are able to see the difference between a three-battery character, a two-battery character, and one whose battery has almost gone out. We rate men accordingly. But all these distinctions fade away in the presence of the white light of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. His coming reveals the profundity of the darkness.

What is your reaction to that? It can be one of two things. You can hate Christ for it, as many people have done. You can try to get rid of his presence in your life. This is what John implies when he says that the darkness did not overcome the light. He could not say that unless the darkness had tried to overcome it. You can do that. Or you can do what God wants you to do. You can say, "Lord, I see now that my own good works are far from perfect. In fact, they seem quite dark, almost nonexistent, by comparison with your righteousness. I realize that they will never take me to heaven. But you have the goodness which I do not have, and you have promised to give it to all who will believe on your Son and receive him as Savior. That is what I do now. I trust you to remove my sin and accept me as your child forever."

If you will say that, God will do as he has promised. For this is the reason why the Lord Jesus Christ came. We are told, "God made him [Jesus Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Light Victorious

The third important point to note in studying this image is the fact that the light of the Lord Jesus Christ has not been overcome by the darkness. In fact, John says, "The light *still shines* in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out" (PHILLIPS).

The word that occurs most prominently in the second part of this verse—the word that is translated "comprehend" in the King James Version of the Bible and is translated as "put it out" by Phillips in the paraphrase that I have just quoted—is a word with at least three meanings. Thus, there has been a wide diversity of interpretations of the verse by translators. On the most literal level the word means "to seize" or "to apprehend," whether physically (as in John 8:4, where the scribes and the Pharisees claimed that they had seized the woman taken in adultery), or intellectually, in which case it would mean "to understand." This is the interpretation given to the verse by the King James translators, who rendered the verse, "and the darkness comprehended it not," as well as by the Latin Vulgate that says, "tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt."

However, the word can also mean "to overtake" and, thus, by extension "to overtake in pursuit" or "to overcome." This is the clear meaning of the verb in the only other place where it occurs in John's Gospel—John 12:35—where we read, "Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you." In this sense the word passed into the sports vocabulary of antiquity and was used when a wrestler was said to have "taken down" his opponent. This is the meaning adopted by Williams, who says that the darkness "never overpowered" the light, and by the New Scofield Bible and the Revised Standard Version, which use the verb "overcome."

All these translations are right. The darkness certainly did not understand the light. It did not overcome it. And yet, there is another meaning of the word that I believe comes even closer to John's true meaning and is more appropriate. It is "to quench," "to extinguish," or "to eclipse," the concepts employed by J. B. Phillips and the New English Bible. Thus, to use the terms of astronomy, which may certainly be involved here, we can say that God's light is shining in the darkness and that it has never been eclipsed.

We do not see this on earth in the unending natural cycles of light and darkness. Here darkness always overcomes light. You can be in the gloomiest country on earth, or the brightest, and night will always

follow upon day. It can be retarded by artificial means, but night comes eventually. I have often noticed how long daylight lasts on evening flights to this country from one of the European capitals. The flights take only six or seven hours, and there is a gain of three hours in flying the 3,000 miles from east to west. The planes fly high, and one can follow the sun for a greater distance over the horizon. On such a flight dusk lingers for almost four hours. Yet the night comes at last, and the plane eventually settles into the blackness that shrouds the eastern seaboard of the United States.

What the physical darkness does each evening, spiritual darkness tried without success to do in the case of Jesus Christ. He simply overcame it. One man who learned this truth rather late in life is Malcolm Muggeridge, England's well-known satirist and social critic. In his words, "Having seen this other light [the light of God revealed in Jesus Christ], I turn to it, striving and growing toward it as plants do toward the sun. ...Though, in terms of history, the darkness falls, blacking out us and our world, You have overcome history. You came as light into the world in order that whoever believed in You should not remain in darkness. Your light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Nor ever will."

"You Are the Light"

In order to see the full teaching of the Gospel of John about light, we need to add to these truths that there is a sense in which in our day Jesus is no longer the light of the world directly but is so only as his light is reflected to the world by Christians. It is true that John uses the present tense in describing Christ's light—"the light *shines* in the darkness"—but John would be the first to say that Christ shines in our day only through Christians (cf. 1 John 2:7-11). Thus, when Jesus was in the world he said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." But when he turned to those who had believed on him, he said, "You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). He did not mean that they were to glow in their own right like fireflies. Rather, they were to be

kindled lights, like John the Baptist, whom Jesus termed a "lamp that burned and gave light" (John 5:35).

To those who did not believe he said, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you" (12:35).

Do you see what Christ is saying? He is saying that today Christians are the light of the world.
But they can be the light of the world only because he is their light and they reflect him. It is as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

Do men see Christ in you? They will not find him in the world today—not in the world's literature, culture, or pastimes. They will see him only as you look to Jesus, as he increasingly becomes your light, and as he is reflected from your life to others.

Is Jesus your light? He is if he does for you what light always does when it issues forth from the Father. First, it puts confusion to flight. This is the picture that we have in the opening chapter of Genesis where we are told how God moved upon the formless void that existed before the world began and said, "Let there be light." The light of God dispelled the darkness and brought forth life and order. If Jesus is the light of your life, he also dispels the darkness and places your life in order.
Second, the light of Jesus Christ is revealing. That is, it penetrates the darkness and shows us what has always been there. If the light of the Lord Jesus has had this effect in you, then you will not be playing the part of the hypocrite. You will have seen your heart. You will have been able to say with Isaiah, "Woe to me! ...I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5); or with Peter, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8); or with Paul, "I am the worst" of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).

Finally, if Christ is your light, you will have guidance in the midst of darkness and, with the guidance of God, true liberty.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night:
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light:
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

Chapter 7.
John the Baptist

John 1:6-8

In the previous studies we have been looking at the person of Jesus Christ and at the things John the evangelist says about him in the first five verses of his Gospel. Now we want to turn to the second person John mentions—John the Baptist. He is mentioned in order that we might learn about his witness to Jesus Christ. John writes, "There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light."

The Forerunner

Most of us tend to overlook the importance of the ministry of John the Baptist. For we focus on the ministry of Jesus Christ, as we should, and we remember that John the Baptist was only the forerunner of the Lord. John says that the Baptist came to bear witness to Jesus Christ. This was his reason for existing. John himself said, "He [Christ] must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30). And yet, if John the Baptist had not lived in that age and if the preparation of Christ's way had not been his primary ministry, we would no doubt look back on him with

the highest praise, much as we look back on Isaiah, Daniel, Jeremiah, Amos, or any of the other great Old Testament figures.

Certainly John was a charismatic figure. We read that droves of people went out to him, much as they later did to hear the Lord Jesus Christ. This following was so substantial that it even disturbed the priests and Levites in Jerusalem who sent delegates to investigate John's teaching. Some of these were also convicted, repented, and were baptized as a sign that they had turned from their sins (Mark 1:4-5).

In some sense, too, John was the pivot of biblical history, for we read in Luke that "the Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John" (Luke 16:16). This means that John was the last of the Old Testament prophets and, hence, the last of the representatives of the old order. After this Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God, which was entered from that time forward by faith in his person. John was also the herald of the new dispensation. So he earned the praise of the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt. 11:11).

This last verse probably refers primarily to the fact that those who came after John and who believed in Jesus would receive the Holy Spirit. But it might also refer to John's extraordinary humility. Jesus said that the one who humbles himself shall be exalted, and John certainly did that. He called himself a voice crying in the wilderness. You cannot see a voice; you can only hear it. Thus, it was John's role and pleasure merely to be the herald of the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Like Paul, who came later, John's concern was solely that Jesus be magnified, whether by his life or his death (Phil. 1:19, 20), and in this he was a true and faithful forerunner.

A Witness

John was also known for his ministry of baptism, and for the fact that he baptized the Lord Jesus

Christ. However, when John the evangelist refers to John the Baptist in the first chapter of the Gospel, he does so not for the sake of his ministry itself or his baptism of Jesus but solely for the sake of his testimony to Jesus. In this sense, the witness of John the Baptist takes its place in the first chapter of the Gospel as an established, historical testimony—so that we might learn that the One who was the light of the world was identified historically for the response of faith and obedience of men.

We see this emphasis upon John's testimony by the way in which the evangelist handles the material relating to Christ's forerunner. Most noticeable perhaps is the absence from John's Gospel of many aspects of John the Baptist's ministry that are present in the synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. For example, John eliminates all references to his preaching of repentance and all mention of him as the herald of God's kingdom. He does not issue a call to repentance in John's Gospel, as in the others (Matt. 3:8; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:8), and he does not engage in water baptism, although several references to baptism in the Gospel show that the evangelist was aware and knew his readers to be aware of this part of the Baptist's activity (1:26; 3:22-26). Moreover, as I have pointed out in my book, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, "When John meets the priests and Levites in Matthew's Gospel, he denounces their hypocrisy, terming them a 'brood of vipers' and pointing to his own baptism as a way of repentance and of salvation from the wrath to come (Matt. 3:7-10). In the fourth Gospel, by contrast, a similar encounter appears in an official character without apparent conflict and is the occasion for the formal presentation of the Baptist's testimony (l:19-34)."

Even more significant than these changes and omissions is the fact that the evangelist does not report the baptism of Jesus himself, even though he shows Jesus to be present in the area of the Jordan during John's ministry and even though the baptism is the crowning point of John's ministry in the synoptic Gospels. Apparently the actual baptism did not have much interest for John the evangelist. Instead, everything is

focused on Jesus Christ. In place of the baptism there is Jesus. In place of an act there is the verbal proclamation.

We can find a good illustration of what this means by imagining that we have been reading an article dealing with Abraham Lincoln. The article speaks of his Gettysburg Address, but there is no reference to the actual battle of Gettysburg or to the fact that Lincoln traveled there in its aftermath to give this eulogy. Suppose further that the article goes on to discuss the president's Second Inaugural Address but again without any reference to the fact that the Civil War was now over and that this address was designed to bind up the nation's wounds. If that were the case, we would recognize at once that the article was interested in Lincoln as a writer and not primarily as a general or a statesman. The article would probably be entitled something like, "Lincoln: The Writer" or "Abraham Lincoln in Prose." It is exactly the same type of selection that is present in the handling of the Baptist's witness in John's Gospel.

Moreover, while it is the case that John's account of the Baptist's ministry is lacking in many of the themes found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it is no less striking that it is also lacking in themes peculiar to the fourth Gospel. Thus, although John tells us that the Baptist was sent to bear witness to the Light, nowhere does the forerunner actually identify Jesus as the Light. And neither does he term Jesus the vine, the bread from heaven, the shepherd, the door, the way, the truth, the life, or any of the other themes that occur later on in John's narrative.

The same point can be made another way. That is, just as the words of the Baptist do not develop the themes of the Gospel, neither does the Gospel develop the themes that are present in the Baptist's witness. If John had wanted to do this, the obvious starting place would have been the
Baptist's reference to Jesus as God's Lamb. But in spite of the fact that the evangelist seems to make clear that Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem at precisely the moment when the lambs were being sacrificed for the Jewish Passover, the theme of the sin-bearing lamb does not recur. On the basis of such observations, we are justified in believing that John

the evangelist preserved the witness of the Baptist word for word so that he might present it almost as what we would call "legal evidence" for the benefit of the readers of the Gospel.

The final proof of this unique interest on the part of John is that the words for "witness" replace those for "preaching" (Matt. 3:1; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3) and "exhortation" (Luke 3:18), which the synoptic writers use of the Baptist's ministry. Thus, in John's evaluation the Baptist emerges as the first and greatest witness to the person and ministry of the Lord. John indicates his interest in him precisely as a witness to the Lord.

A Faithful Witness

We are going to be studying the actual testimony of John the Baptist later on. But even at this point we should notice that we have here an outline of what made the witness of Christ's forerunner effective. This is important because it tells us how we too can be effective as we also seek to bear a testimony to our Lord.

The outline is stated quite clearly in verses 7 and 8, although, to be sure, it is clearer in the Greek text than it is in the English. It has three parts. John writes that the Baptist, who was sent from God (1) was not the Light but (2) was sent to bear witness to the Light in order that (3) men might believe through him. This outline was pointed out quite clearly by Professor C. H. Dodd of Cambridge University, England, who also shows that this is precisely the outline that the evangelist employs in the verses immediately following the prologue. That is, verses 19-28 show that the Baptist was not the Light; verses 29-34 picture him pointing to the Light; and verses 3551 show how that witness resulted in the first men coming to believe in Christ's person.

Think what this means personally. In the first place, John the Baptist was aware that he was *not* the Light. This is important simply because all successful witnessing to Jesus Christ must start with this self-realization. Whenever a Christian layman, minister, writer, teacher, or whoever it might be, gets to thinking that there is something important about him, he or she will always cease to be effective as Christ's

witness. The testimony will stop. Unfortunately, this has been true of many Christians and of many important Christian movements.

Second, John bore witness to the Light. This is important also, because there are always many shy or uncertain Christians who feel that they are bearing a witness simply because they are "living" the Christian faith or refusing to do certain things and doing others. They "live" it at work, at school, in their homes. Unfortunately, important as it may be, this is not in itself witnessing. It is what Paul Little, the author of the helpful and stimulating little book *How to Give Away Your Faith,* calls "pre-evangelism." Living the faith is a most essential basis for any effective witness. If we do not live what we profess, the profession will be discredited. Yet, living the faith is not itself witnessing.

Witnessing is speaking to others about Jesus Christ. This is implied in the very word itself, for witnessing is a legal term that points to verbal testimony rendered in a court of law. If we are to do this effectively, we must be able to tell who Jesus Christ is, what he said about the depravity of man's nature, why his death and resurrection are the essential elements in the solution to the problem of man's sin and depravity, and how one comes into a relationship with Jesus personally.

Finally, the witness must be given with the belief of other persons in Jesus Christ as its object. John, we are told, bore witness to the Light "that through him all men might believe." It should be almost unnecessary to mention this, of course, for it is obvious. Yet it is necessary simply because it is possible for a person to become so mechanical in his witness that he can go through all the motions of witnessing without actually looking and praying for the response to Christ in faith by the other person. If we could remember this, we would find witnessing exciting, and we would learn that winning the argument often becomes far less important than winning the person to the Lord.

The Results

Two conclusions follow. First, when a witness is so given—that is, with the awareness on the part of the one witnessing that he or she is not the Light but is only pointing to the Light in order that men and women might believe—then men and women *will* believe. This is God's way of doing things. He says that he has chosen to save men by the foolishness of preaching, and this means by the foolishness of verbal proclamation. It is foolish, as men think of it. But it is the power of God unto salvation for those who will believe.

We have a demonstration of this in the remainder of the chapter, in the verses referred to earlier. For after John has borne his witness to the Light, declaring, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29), the evangelist records that there was a whole string of disciples who followed Jesus as the result of this testimony. First, there were two disciples, one of whom was Andrew. Andrew found his brother Simon, and Simon became a follower. After this there was Philip, then Nathanael. Then there were others. Clearly, when a witness to Jesus Christ is given in the way John the Baptist gave it, people will believe.

The second conclusion is related to this. It is simply that if you will witness in this way, men and women will believe as the result of *your* testimony.

There are seven different kinds of witness mentioned in the pages of John's Gospel. The most important is the witness of Jesus Christ himself. Jesus said, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going" (John 8:14). The second witness is the witness of the Father. Again Jesus noted, "I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me" (8:18). There is the witness of the Holy Spirit who "will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you" (16:13-14). In addition to the testimony of the three persons of the Trinity, there are also these: the witness of the Scriptures, the witness of Christ's works, and the witness of John the

Baptist, which we have just been considering. That makes six witnesses, but there is one more. It is the witness of ordinary men and women. The first of these very human testimonies is given by the Samaritan woman, and her witness is followed by the testimony of the multitude that had seen the raising of Lazarus; the special witness of the eleven disciples; and the testimony of the beloved disciple who was an eyewitness of the crucifixion. You and I are, therefore, included in this last category of witnesses.

What does that mean? It means that God regards your testimony as being important enough to be included among all those other monumental testimonies to the person and work of the glorious Lord Jesus Christ. Your testimony may not have a very wide scope. It is certainly not as world embracing as the testimony of the Scriptures. It may not be spectacular, as was the testimony of John the Baptist. Still it is most important. You know a special aspect of Christ's personality or work to which only you can point adequately. And what is more, as you do point to it and witness to him, men and women will come to know him personally as their Savior.

Chapter 8.
Light for Every Man

John 1:9

What was the greatest moment in the history of the world? The traditional answer would be either the discovery of fire or the invention of the wheel. A historian might refer to the flowering of the intellectual life of Greece in the fifth century B.C. Another might argue for the imposition of world law under the authority of the Roman Empire. A modern person might refer to the discovery of atomic energy or, in our own time, to travels beyond the earth—to the moon and perhaps one day to the planets.

These moments in the history of the human race are interesting, of course, and important. In their own way they are very significant. But no thinking Christian would ever answer the question by pointing to one of these happenings. The only answer that a Christian can give would be the coming into human history of the Lord God Almighty in the person of Jesus Christ. Beside that event all other events fade into insignificance by comparison. This moment alone is preeminent. It is about this moment that our text speaks when it points to the coming of Jesus Christ during the days of John the Baptist. "The real light which enlightens every man was even then coming into the world" (John 1:9 NEB).

The Light Was Coming

If we are to understand this verse properly, we need to understand at the outset that it is talking about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and not, as some versions of the Bible indicate, the coming of light into the lives of all men.

In the Greek text that stands behind our English Bibles, the word translated "coming" occurs in such a place and with such endings that the reference itself is ambiguous. This ambiguity was noticed as far back in church history as the time of the early church writer Origen, in the second century. On the one hand, the word "coming" could refer to the phrase "every man." In that case, the words should be translated the way we find them in the King James Bible ("That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world") or in the paraphrase of the New Testament by J. B. Phillips, which makes it even clearer ("That was the true light that shines upon every man as he comes into the world"). In this form the text is a proof text for the doctrine of natural revelation, the teaching that God has given all men sufficient illumination to come to him. The early Quakers, who believed in natural revelation, were so fond of this text that some of them even called it "the Quakers' text."

There are some difficulties with this interpretation, however, even though the Greek text makes it theoretically possible. For one thing, in

this form the verse is redundant. Thus, it is hardly necessary to add that the light shines on every man as he *comes into the world,* for that much is implied by his very existence. For another thing—and this is even more significant—the phrase "coming into the world" is not used elsewhere by John of a man being born. It always has an entirely different meaning, as we shall see.

Another interpretation suggests that "coming" refers, not to "every man" but to the "Light." In this form the reference is to the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is far better. This is the view of all the major commentators, including Frederick Godet, B. F. Westcott, J. H. Bernard, and others, and it is the view reflected in translations of the Revised Standard Version, the New English Bible, and the New International Version.

There are several reasons why this translation should be preferred, besides the fact that the Bible does not elsewhere support the idea of an inner light for every man. First, the phrase "coming into the world," while not used elsewhere in John of the birth of a man, is used frequently for the coming into human history of Jesus Christ. Thus, at the multiplication of loaves and fishes the multitude exclaimed, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world" (6:14). Martha told Jesus, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (11:27). Jesus said, "I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father" (16:28). To Pilate's remark, "You are a king then!" the Lord Jesus replied, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me" (18:37).

Second, the verse in this form fits perfectly into the context of John's prologue, which proceeds from the ministry of Jesus before the incarnation, through the preparatory work of John the Baptist, to a description of the incarnation itself and of men's response to it. Without this interpretation John would be speaking of the reaction of men to Christ's coming in verses 10-12 before he actually says that Jesus came into the world. With it the passage flows along perfectly. When John

wrote his first epistle he could say, "The true light is already shining" (1 John 2:8), but here he acknowledges that the true Light was only coming when the ministry of John the Baptist began. We should therefore translate the passage, "John the Baptist was not that Light. He was only sent to bear witness to the Light. Nevertheless, the true Light, which shines upon every man, was even then (i.e., during the lifetime of John the Baptist) coming into the world."

A Genuine Light

John 1:9 is interesting for several reasons. First, it says that the Light that was even then coming into the world was the "true" or "genuine" Light. In the Greek language there are two different but related words that are almost always translated "true" in our Bibles. The first is the word *alēthēs* which means "true" as opposed to "false." That is, if you were to make a statement in a court of law, it would be either true or false, right or wrong. But that is not the word that John uses here.

Here John uses the word *alēthinos*. This word means "true" as opposed to "partial" or, as we would say, "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" as opposed to part of it. A better way of translating this word would be by use of the terms "real" or "genuine." Thus, we should say that the light of the Lord Jesus Christ was the real light beside which all other lights were imperfect or misleading.

This is of great importance. Every now and then we hear a Christian say that there is no good to be found in anything that has its origin in the world. But that is not entirely true. It is true that no good coming out of man or out of his world will ever please God, but still there are good things in life when they are seen from man's perspective. The things I referred to earlier fall into this category—inventions, philosophy, law, atomic energy, adventure, and so on—and we would be poorer without them. John is not denying that these things have value in a limited way. However, he is saying that these lights are only partial lights and are misleading if followed exclusively. Christ alone is the Light that enlightens all darkness and gives illumination spiritually.

Unfortunately, men will always mistake the partial lights for the real one. Take a few current examples. One light that men followed, particularly in the nineteenth century and well into this one, was the light of "progress." A belief in "progress" was based upon the discoveries of science and diplomacy, and it was linked at least psychologically to the theory of evolution. Men followed this light by droves. But the dream of progress burst like a bubble in the history of two world wars. Before the Second World War men would laugh at those who spoke literally of the judgments recorded in the Book of Revelation—massive destruction and the loss of life, great plagues, geological catastrophes, and signs in the heavens. But now, since the advent of the world's nuclear arsenals, the subject is not so humorous. Most persons are willing to admit that the doctrine of inevitable progress was illusory.

Another partial light is the pursuit of material prosperity. We follow the dream to great excess in America. Thanks to us, much of the world now follows it also, or would like to. This is the idea that happiness comes through an annual wage hike, second car, summer home, four-day workweek, or round-the-world vacations. Once again, these things have a limited benefit. They are at least relatively better than the kind of abject poverty we find in much of India or in the Far East. They are better than death by starvation, better than illiteracy and unemployment. Still they are not the way to contentment. They do not make the heart of a man right with God. Thus, a few years ago, in the midst of the most prosperous age this world has ever known, *Time* magazine spoke of ours as "the age of anxiety" and could find no cure for its malaise.

The world's lights are not necessarily false lights. But they are imperfect lights. They are partial. They do not provide that which men most need for the satisfaction of the inner hunger of their souls. John is saying that the place where men and women can find adequate illumination about themselves and about life under the eye of an almighty and righteous God is Jesus. We are to look to him. Those who will do that will find that he is the One able to guide them through the darkest night, who will enable them to distinguish between the lights that are better and the

lights that are worse, and who will cause them to grow spiritually and in every other way.

Every Man

The second important teaching in this verse is that today the light of the Lord Jesus Christ shines on *every* man. Here we are helped by realizing that John is writing out of a definite historical situation. John was writing toward the end of the apostolic era, and he had known the conflicts that had come about as the result of preaching the gospel to the Jews. The Jews, like some modern American Christians, thought that because God had blessed them in a certain historical way they were therefore the only ones whom God could be blessing. They looked back to their religious heritage and boasted in it. They considered the light that God had shed abroad to be their property exclusively. John writes that Jesus came to shine upon all men so that Greeks and Romans, as well as Jews, might share in his kingdom.

That is glorious, of course. But it also has a somber side. For we ask ourselves, "What does the light do when it shines, as it does, on every man?" We must answer, "It brings the works of darkness to light." When Jesus Christ came into the world he was a light such as the world had never seen before, and men hated him for existing simply because he revealed how dirty and vile their lives were morally. He did that then and he does that today. Hence, if you will allow his light to shine upon you, the first thing you will discover is that you are at heart a child of the darkness.

Suppose for a moment that in your town some soap manufacturer would hold a huge contest and invite the homemakers to come together and wash their linen tablecloths. The cameras would be there to record it for television commercials. One manufacturer would be pushing his product as "the hungry detergent." Another would be saying that his was "enzyme active." A third would say his had "punch." The homemakers wash their linen in these products and when the washing is over and the linen is dry, they spread the tablecloths on the grass to get the benefit of the natural light. Just as they are getting around to the

judging, it snows. Isn't it true that in spite of the washing, every tablecloth there would seem to be dirty yellow?

It is the same spiritually. Between persons there is some ground for comparison. We can say that Joe is better than Sam and that Bill is worse than both. John is so-so. George is not bad. But next to the Lord Jesus Christ all that we are appears to be dirty, and God says that at best "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). Have you seen that? If you have, then you are ready to yield to Christ for your cleansing, your transformation, and your true growth.

Not long ago a longtime missionary to Korea named Archibald Campbell wrote a book comparing Korea as he found it with Korea now. He had served in Korea for more than forty years. "In Korea... there was spiritual darkness until the gospel of Christ was brought in. Men sold their daughters, their sisters, and sometimes their wives into prostitution without a qualm of conscience. Better-class women were not to be seen on the streets. Young girls had to wear great hats, made of reeds, four feet across, which completely hid their faces from view. Wife beating was commonplace. I have seen a man dragging his wife along the street by the hair. Onlookers shrugged their shoulders and said, 'That thing's going to die.' My own frantic appeal to the Chief of Police proved useless. There was little that could be called integrity. ...Selfishness was in the very physical make up. ...Medicine men were in business for a living, but hospital service for the sick and afflicted was beyond comprehension. If they can't pay for it, let 'em die! Lepers were outcasts. The blind were beggars."

It is a grim picture, although one not without parallels elsewhere. But then, as Campbell shows, the gospel of God's grace through the Lord Jesus Christ arrived, and in the space of just two generations the country began to be transformed. Values changed, and this was true even though the light of Christ had begun to shine in only a small percentage of the vast population.

The effect can be seen by the following story. In one of the refugee camps that came into being as the result of the Korean War, there was a

Korean couple who had a son named Oh In Ho. Oh In Ho had a chance to come to America, an almost unbelievable opportunity at that time, and he chose to come to Philadelphia where he enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania. One evening, on the way to mail a letter, he was attacked by a gang of teenage thugs and was killed. His refugee parents were miles away in Korea. They were living in a hovel made of scrap lumber. But they were Christians, and they were surrounded by Christian friends. From their friends and from their own almost nonexistent savings, these Korean Christians collected hundreds of dollars. Then they sent it to America with the request that the murderers of their son be forgiven and that, with this money, they be sent to a Christian school where they might learn about the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a judgment that act was on so-called "Christian" America. It is an example of the transforming light of the Lord Jesus Christ who in the lifetime of John the Baptist was even then beginning to shine upon our world.

Chapter 9.
Jesus, the Unknown

John 1:10

Have you ever heard the story of the medieval king who left his kingdom in the hands of servants and rode away to battle? He was gone for years. During those years the kingdom became more and more corrupt. When he returned at last, the king discovered that those whom he once had commanded had quite forgotten him and wherever he went he was unrecognized. This is what happened when the King of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ, first entered human history. He had made the world, the apostle John says, but the world had forgotten him. Thus, although "he was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him" (John 1:10).

Jesus, the unknown! It is a puzzling and astonishing idea. I suppose that in our century the bestknown person in the whole history of the world is Jesus Christ. His name is known, not only in the Western world but also in the East and, indeed, in the farthest corners of our globe. His name is on millions of tongues daily. Yet John is telling us that for some thirty years, from the birth of Jesus until the time of the public ministry of John the Baptist, the Lord of glory was in the world of men but was unknown by them. This fact points a most instructive finger at the extent of the depravity of man, for it shows that men were (and are) spiritually blind.

Depravity of Man's Will

Why was it that the world did not know and recognize the Lord Jesus Christ when he was present? The first answer to that question is that the world did not want him. We know from experience that if a man does not want to see a truth (or an injustice either, for that matter), he will not see it. So, in exactly the same way, men and women did not recognize the Lord Jesus Christ primarily because they did not want to recognize him.

Of course, this runs counter to the estimate most people have of themselves. Some time ago a well-known Bible teacher was interviewed on a Christmas television program by a young woman who was apparently very ignorant of spiritual things. She wanted to add a religious note to her program. So she began by saying how much the spirit of Christmas is needed in our day, just as it was at the birth of Jesus nearly two thousand years ago. She noted how eagerly the whole world waited for the coming of the baby Jesus. The Bible teacher replied that he did not want to seem contradictory but that he was obliged to say that her statement was far from the truth. In fact (and he gave the details) even the various elements of the Christmas story show that the world actually wanted to go about its merrymaking and cupidity without being disturbed by any thoughts about God.

We ourselves can see the truth of this statement. In our Bibles we have the story of Mary and Joseph traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem

when Jesus was about to be born. What happens?
We find that the innkeeper does not want him, and so the Lord of glory is born in a stable.
Perhaps as much as two years later wise men come to Jerusalem inquiring after the one born King of the Jews, and Herod doesn't want him. He has the babies of Bethlehem murdered, thinking by that means to eliminate a potential rival to his earthly throne. The same story shows the religious leaders correctly answering Herod's question concerning the birthplace of the Messiah: "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written" (Matt. 2:5). But it is the wise men from the East and not the spiritual leaders of Jerusalem who travel to Bethlehem and there fall down and worship Jesus. The world will always miss the real Christmas because it does not want to be disturbed in its affairs.

A text that puts this great fact theologically is found just two chapters later in John's Gospel: "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (3:19). Jesus was the Light of the world. When he came into the world his light shone upon men's darkness and revealed the darkness for what it was. Men hated him for it. Thus, they would not acknowledge him to be God's Son, the Lord of glory.

Men and women simply did not want to acknowledge Christ, and they do not want to acknowledge him now. So the corruption that was in the world at Christ's first coming continues.
I remember how shocked and astonished I was at my discovery of the moral depravity of the Roman world of Christ's day the first time I visited the remains of the ancient Roman city of Pompeii.

Pompeii was buried by an eruption of Vesuvius in a.d. 79. Today it has been uncovered, and a person can therefore visit the city and come away with the feeling that he has almost seen life as it was during the first century. I remember my visit, and I remember my shock at discovering the visual record in Pompeii of the city's moral and sexual depravity. But it is the same today. The point of John's statement is that

men and women are so in love with their sins that they do not want anyone to dissuade them from them.

Today, in so-called "Christian" America, identical things are practiced; the same kinds of pictures are sold. And the heart of man is again demonstrated to be "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," as God declares it to be. Men do not want Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Blindness

The second reason why the world did not know the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming is that the world was unable to recognize him; that is, not only did men not want to see him, they also were spiritually blind. Thus we read in Paul's two great letters to the Corinthians, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:3-4), and "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

What happened when man fell into sin? How far did man fall? There are only four answers to that question theologically, and only one of them is biblical. The first view is that man fell upward. This idea has entered Western thought largely through the impact of the evolutionary theory, and it is held by those who believe that just as man is supposed to have evolved from lower forms of life to higher forms so also has his understanding of God and his morality moved upward. This is entirely false, however, and we must see that man is no better today because, instead of being able to pick up one stone hammer and hit one other man over the head so that he kills him, he is now able to pick up a nuclear bomb and annihilate thousands. Our own recent history of wars and violence should be enough to teach us that, whatever man did when he fell, he certainly did not fall upward.

The second answer is that man fell but that he only fell part way. It says that he fell over the edge, but that he caught the edge with his fingers and dangles there until someone comes along and helps him back up. This is where religion comes in; sometimes the tools that are used are the sacraments. This view is obviously found in the Christian church. But it is not biblical.

The third view is that man fell over the edge but that he got stuck on a shelf halfway down. Those who believe in this doctrine would be quick to admit, verbally at least, that man is a fallen being. They would even use biblical language to insist that he is indeed "dead in trespasses and sins." Nevertheless, if you press them closely, you will find that they believe that even though a man is dead spiritually he is still capable of doing something. In other words, as Donald Grey Barnhouse once said, you might say that such persons believe that although man is in his coffin he nevertheless has one arm outside of it working for himself. Clearly this is not the biblical view either. The biblical view is that when man fell into sin he fell all the way to the bottom and there he lies hopelessly lost, blind to all spiritual truth, and unable to help himself until God reaches down by grace, lifts him up, sets him on the edge, and then says, "Now, this is the way, walk in it." This is a true picture of man's spiritual inability or blindness, and it is as a result of such blindness as well as man's willfullness that the Lord Jesus Christ was unrecognized.

When we understand that this is an accurate picture of man as God sees him, then we also understand why it was that John the Baptist had to appear as Christ's forerunner. What was the Baptist's ministry? John tells us that the Baptist came to bear witness to the Light. And the point is that if he had not come to bear witness to the Light, no one, including Christ's disciples, would have noticed him.

A story about Donald Grey Barnhouse perfectly illustrates John's function. Dr. Barnhouse was preaching in Ireland at the beginning of the Second World War at a time when, because of the German bombing, a blackout was imposed at a certain hour each evening. It happened that this hour occurred in the midst of Dr. Barnhouse's evening studies. One

evening after he had been preaching in the dark for about twenty minutes, someone in a back room accidentally threw the main switch that turned on all the lights in the church. Instantly, there was considerable commotion in the congregation. In particular, a man in the front row began to paw at the person next to him and ask in a loud whisper, "What happened? Why did he stop?" He was quite agitated until his friend explained that the lights had come on accidentally. The man, of course, was blind. He was the one person in the auditorium who could not see the light.

This man is a picture of all men when the light of Jesus Christ first shone upon the world. He was the Light. He was in the world. But the world went about its business until John the Baptist came, crying, "The light is on! The light is on!" When that was said the world looked up with its sightless, sunken eyes, and asked, "What is light?" And they did not respond until God reached down and began to touch their eyes so that some of them might see. To some of these the apostle Peter later wrote, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

If we have understood the significance of the fact that men and women did not recognize the Lord Jesus Christ when he came into the world, then we have also begun to understand three of the most important teachings of John's Gospel. The first is the glory of Jesus Christ. The second is the total depravity of man, which, indeed, is taught throughout Scripture. The third is the necessity of God's sovereign and unconditional election as the basis of our salvation.

Everything we have said up to this point substantiates the first two of these teachings. The glory of Jesus Christ is evident, and the spiritual depravity of our race is demonstrated by the willfullness and spiritual blindness of all men apart from the unmerited grace of God in their lives.

If there is any doubt of this, we need only to ask, "After the Light of the world was pointed out to men by John the Baptist, what did men do

about him?" and then weigh the answer. The answer is that after the Lord Jesus Christ had been forced upon man's gaze, both by the ministry of the forerunner and by Christ's own public ministry, men responded not by falling down and worshiping him as they ought to have done but by crucifying him. The cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is the response of fallen men to God's goodness.

The third of John's teachings—the need for the sovereign and unconditional election of men by God as the basis of their salvation—flows from the first two and, in fact, is taught just three verses farther on in John's Gospel. If it is true (as it is) that people are totally unable to seek or find God, then the only basis on which anyone ever finds God is that God comes *first of all* seeking him. And isn't that what we are taught quite openly and repeatedly in the Bible? What happens in the opening pages of the Book of Genesis? Man sins and immediately reveals the nature and extent of that sin by running away from God. He hides. But then—marvelous truth— God comes to him, seeking him out. The first recorded question of God in the history of the universe is this one: "Where are you?" In the same way today he comes calling.

You may be saying, "But I am an exception. I have not run away from God. I have sought God. I sought God in the Presbyterian church; and when I couldn't find him in the Presbyterian church, I joined the Methodist church. When I couldn't find God there, I became a Baptist. After that I became a Christian Scientist. Now I am hunting for God by means of drugs through mysticism." The answer to that is that you have not been seeking God; you have been running away from him. When God got close to you in the Presbyterian church you left it and became a Methodist. When he got close to you in the Methodist church you became a Baptist. So it was. You went from church to church to church. And God is calling out, "When are you going to stop running away from me, my child? I want you, and I want to take you to myself."

Let us learn that the first great word that God has to speak to us is that we—you and I—do not naturally want him. But his second word is that in spite of that fact, in spite of our sin, he still loves us and comes to us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, his Son, to draw us back to

himself. If you believe that, God is already at work in your heart and will in time add to that faith a full measure of spiritual understanding.

Chapter 10.
His Own Received Him Not

John 1:11

The opening verses of John's Gospel have already introduced us to two very significant themes: the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the depravity of man. These themes are foils to one another. For in this magnificent prologue to the Gospel, the depravity of man is seen precisely in the fact that men failed to recognize the Lord Jesus Christ when he came among them. No sooner has this been said, however, than someone will ask, "But certainly there should be an exception to this blanket description of human depravity. Haven't you forgotten about the Jews, his own people? They had the prophecies of his coming; they had the law; they even had John the Baptist. He came to them especially. Surely they must have recognized him?" But John answers that this is no exception; for, "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:11). In fact, John would say, it is in the light of this inexplicable rejection of Jesus by the Jews that we see the depravity of man most clearly.

From early Greek history comes the story of Agamemnon, the king who (according to Homeric lore) commanded the expedition against Troy. There were three great figures on the Greek side: Agamemnon, Achilles, and Odysseus. Of the three, only Agamemnon returned home quickly with honor after the long war. Achilles was killed at Troy. Odysseus returned only after many years of wandering and many hardships. Agamemnon alone returned in triumph and in safety. But then tragedy struck. For Agamemnon was killed by his wife, who had in the meantime proved unfaithful to him.

This was the great story of infidelity in ancient times. For most ancients it was the sum of perfidy. But it was far less significant and far less dramatic than the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ by Israel. He had created them, called them into existence as a nation, and foretold his coming to them. Then, when he came, he was rejected by Israel and was crucified. John states it very simply. "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:11). This is now the supreme demonstration of the wickedness of the heart of man.

Past History

This is not surprising, of course. For it was only an act illustrated many times previously in Jewish history. Indeed, throughout the Old Testament we find that the people of Israel despised the men who brought them the blessings of God and spoke for him, and they chose instead the counsels of their own hearts.

We see the principle first in the patriarchs. Abraham had been told by God that he and Sarah were to have a son through whom Abraham would become a great nation and all the families of the earth would be blessed. But Abraham followed his own way instead of God's. He had a son by Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian slave girl. When God came to him again to repeat the promise, Abraham replied, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" (Gen. 17:18). His heart, like our hearts, did not naturally want God's way. In the same way, Isaac tried to bless Esau instead of Jacob, in spite of the fact that God had chosen Jacob to carry on the line of Israel. God was obliged to overrule him. A generation later we find the sons of Jacob trying to murder their brother Joseph because God had revealed that he was going to exalt Joseph and use him for a special purpose.

Moses was the first leader to find out what this tendency on the part of the people was to mean nationally. God had delivered them from Egypt and had done so through ten great miracles, beginning with the changing of the waters of the Nile into blood and ending with the death of Egypt's firstborn. But the people had no sooner left Egypt—in fact, they had not yet crossed the Red Sea—than they began to murmur

against Moses and the Lord. They said, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"
(Exod. 14:11-12). Later, when they were actually in the wilderness, they rebelled again, crying, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy... why then do you set yourselves above the LORD'S assembly?" (Num. 16:3).

When Jeremiah preached to the southern kingdom of Judah the people said, "We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD!" (Jer. 44:16). When Amos came to Bethel to preach against the corruption of the northern kingdom, Amaziah, the court priest, reported his activities to the king saying, "Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel" (Amos 7:10). He told Amos, "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom" (Amos 7:12-13).

Christ's Parable

When the Lord Jesus Christ came he was received with the same contempt and disdain. Thus, toward the end of his ministry but before his crucifixion he summed up their reaction in the parable of the landowner and his vineyard.

"There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.

"But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw his out of the vineyard and killed him. "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes'?

"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."

Matthew 21:33-43

Later we read that when "the chief priests and Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them" (v. 45).

In this parable God himself is the householder. The earth is the vineyard. The people of Israel are the tenant farmers. The prophets are the servants who came with the Lord's message and were beaten, stoned, and murdered. The son is the Lord Jesus Christ. The murder of the son is Christ's crucifixion. The casting out of the wicked servants is the replacement of Israel as a special people by the Church in this age of Gentile blessing. Clearly this is a picture in the Lord's own language of the truths preserved for us in John's prologue. *"He [Jesus] was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God"* (John 1:10-12).

No Excuse

At this point we naturally want to go on to describe the free offer of the gospel to people in our age. But before we do we need to answer one more objection. It is an important objection. Someone will say, "But surely they must have had an excuse? There must have been a failure of communications." But this is only the way men think, not God, and the objection is invalid.

Men are always ready to make excuses for their conduct, even when it is obviously wrong. Sometime ago I heard a story of a little boy who was at home several days before Christmas and who knew that all the presents had been brought in and were hidden away in his father's closet. He was not supposed to go into that closet. But the time came when he could no longer resist the temptation. So he slipped up to his father's room, opened the closet door, and began pulling the presents out and unwrapping them. Suddenly, in the midst of his unwrapping, he heard the front door open and his father's footsteps ascending the stairs. Quickly he pushed the wrappings inside the closet. Then, since he had nowhere else to go, he stepped in after them and closed the door.

He stood there breathless as his father entered the room and approached the closet. When his father opened the door, there he stood with wrapping paper all around him, feeling guilty. His father asked, "What are you doing here?" And the little boy said, "Everybody's got to be someplace."

That is a revelation of the human heart. We make excuses for our conduct. But God will not allow us to get away with excuses and will force us instead to face up to the reality of our situation. Thus, we are not allowed to make excuses for any rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ on the part of Israel.

We say, "But surely there must have been an excuse for Israel." But there was no valid excuse. And there is no excuse for people who reject the Lord Jesus Christ today. Think of the reasons why Israel should have recognized their Messiah. In the first place, they had the prophecies of his coming. These included the prophecies of his suffering and death just as much as the forecast of his glorious reign.

They are found in Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, and so on. Like all men, Israel found what they wanted to find in the Word of God and ignored the rest. They opened the Old Testament: there were the prophecies that told how the Messiah was to be beaten and killed, bearing the iniquities of the people. They should have understood, for they had the history of the sacrifices in Israel to help them interpret these things. Yet they flipped over these pages and instead chose ones that spoke of Christ's triumph. That they talked about and anticipated.

Also they had the evidence of Christ's miracles. To some extent the evidential value of the miracles is overrated by Christians; that is, the miracles are taken as having more value in leading a person to faith in Christ than they were intended to have. People have said that the miracles prove Christ's divine origin, but that does not necessarily follow. For one thing, in Christ's own day some saw his miracles and attributed them to Satan, and even Jesus did not deny that as a possible conclusion. He only pointed out that it was invalid in his case since his miracles were directed against the power of Satan himself. For another thing, the miracles do not in themselves prove any more than that Jesus was a miracle worker.

For the gentile world, then, the miracles are of only very limited value and interest. But this is not the case within Judaism. In Judaism the miracles had exceptional value. And this was true precisely because they were prophesied in the Old Testament about the Messiah. When Jesus came he fulfilled them; thus, he should have been recognized by Israel on this basis.

It was just as though a spy, who wanted to be able to identify a person bearing a message from his friend, should tear a dollar bill in half and give one half to his friend to be given later to the messenger. When the messenger came, the two halves of the dollar bill would be matched perfectly. In the same way, God declared beforehand to Israel what the Messiah would do. When Jesus came he did it, miracles and all. Thus, they should have received him. Interestingly enough, this was precisely the argument that Jesus used with the disciples of John the Baptist who came to him at one point with John's question, "Are you the one who

was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Luke 7:20). Jesus answered, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me" (vv.. 22-23). In other words, "You may judge by that whether or not I am fulfilling Scripture."

The third reason why the Jews of Christ's day should have believed on him is the ministry of John the Baptist. John was an extraordinary figure, and he attracted a great deal of attention, so much so, in fact, that the leaders of the nation sent priests and Levites to ask him if he was himself the Messiah. This was an official delegation, and John's answer was an official response. He said, "I am not the Christ." The following day he pointed to Jesus and said, "Look, the Lamb of God." Israel should have followed John's testimony and received Jesus.

All Are Guilty

But where does this leave us—in some sort of privileged, protected position? Can we say, "Well, the Jews are guilty, but thank God we're not like that"? Not at all. In fact, if we really understand the Jews' reaction, we will understand the Gentiles' reaction also. And we will learn that the reaction of Israel is only typical of the reaction of all mankind to Christ's coming.

The Jews had prophecies of Christ's coming, but so does the world today. In fact, the Scriptures of the Old Testament are far more widely translated and circulated in our age than in any age previously. And for us there is the added advantage that we are told in the New Testament how Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled them. The Jews of Jesus' day saw the miracles, but we also have a record of the miracles. What is more, we have evidence of the miraculous power of Jesus Christ in the lives of countless millions of Christians, many of whom have demonstrated Christ's ability to be victorious in them over the worst that life can offer. Finally, we also have the witness of John the Baptist and of that great host of men and women since him whose lives have been transformed

by Jesus and who have been called by him to proclaim the eternal gospel.

Where do you stand? If you are running away, saying, "Well, those things are interesting as myths or stories, but I won't take them seriously," you are trying to escape reality. You cannot get away with it permanently. You must face these truths now or at the judgment seat of Christ. On the other hand, you need not continue to run. You need not be identified with those, both Jews and Gentiles, who will not receive Christ. Receive him, and thereby become a child of God by faith in his name.

Chapter 11.
The Free Offer of the Gospel

John 1:12

We have seen two very important themes in the prologue to John's Gospel: the glory of Jesus Christ, and the depravity of man. The glory of Jesus is described in verses 1-9. The depravity of man is shown by man's rejection of Jesus when he came. These two themes leave us at the end of verse 11, with a very depressing picture. Men as a whole did not know Jesus; and, by and large, his own people, the Jews, who should have known better, rejected him. Are we to think then that no one believed? No, that would be a false inference. So John hurries to point out that although the Lord of glory was unknown by the world at large and was rejected by the nation of Israel, nevertheless, there were some who did receive him. He writes, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

This is a glorious verse, especially since it comes, as it does, after the dismal picture of the preceding verses. It is a verse for you personally. It reminds us here at the very beginning of the Gospel—even before the account of the crucifixion and the resurrection—that the gospel of

salvation by grace apart from the keeping of the law is today offered freely to all men, and it points to the glorious privilege of those who receive it.

God's Children

We need to look at this statement in parts, beginning with the part declaring that those who believe become God's children. How are we to understand this? If we are to understand it rightly, we need to recognize first that people are not (or do not become) God's children naturally. The ideas of the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man have been popular themes in the past. But this is not biblical teaching. It is true that Paul told the men of Athens: "We are his offspring" (Acts 17:28), but that is not the same thing as saying that we are God's legitimate children. And what is more, in that verse Paul was actually only quoting a Greek poet, either Aratus or Cleanthes, obviously in order to establish a point of contact with his Greek hearers. In his own teaching, by contrast, he stresses that we become God's children only by means of the new birth.

It is also true that there are verses in the Old Testament that speak of the nation of Israel as God's child or of the Jews as God's children. In Exodus 4:22 Israel is called the "firstborn" son of God. David says in the Psalms: "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him" (Ps. 103:13). Isaiah has written, "O LORD, you are our Father" (Isa. 64:8). Jeremiah says, "I thought how I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beauteous of all nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me. Surely, as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so have you been faithless to me, O house of Israel, says the LORD" (Jer. 3:19-20 RSV). Although this is true, we must note that these verses are not talking about the Babylonians, Egyptians, Syrians, or even Americans. They are talking about God's relationship to Israel and, thus, about a special relationship that they had to God and that was possessed by no other people at that time. Moreover—and this is much to the point—not one of these verses

makes the relationship of father to son the relationship of God to any *individual* Israelite.

The true biblical teaching is seen most clearly in the great discussion of this theme by Jesus

Christ as recorded in the eighth chapter of the Gospel. The starting point of the discussion, as John records it, was the question of freedom. Jesus had said, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Because this was a touchy theme in a country that was then under the rule of the Roman armies, Jesus' Jewish hearers reacted to Christ's words violently, saying, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" (v. 33). Jesus did not bother to refute their absurd contention although he could have. They had been slaves to the Egyptians, Babylonians, Syrians, Moabites, Edomites, Ammonites, Philistines, Greeks, and Romans. There had almost never been a power in the ancient Near East to which they had not been in bondage at some time or other. But Jesus did not speak about this. He was speaking of a slavery to sin.

Even this was a sore spot with Jesus' hearers, as it is to people today. So they answered by becoming vicious, probably accusing Jesus of being illegitimate. "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself (v. 41). At this point Jesus nailed down the whole subject by denying that they were in any sense God's children. For, "If God were your Father, you would love me.... You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire" (vv. 42, 44).

Now if the Jews, who had a special historical relationship to God, could not be called his children even by Jesus Christ, who was himself a Jew, how much less can this be true of the rest of us. It is true that not all men are children of the devil. A person becomes a child of the devil in the same way that another becomes a child of God; that is, by a moral commitment to him and to his principles. Nevertheless, a man is not naturally a child of the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ either. According to the Bible he becomes a child of God only through a new birth.

By Whose Authority?

The second important part of the verse is the part that declares that we become God's children not on the basis of any human authority but on

the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. The verse says, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

The importance of this is that it gives the one who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ great boldness. On one of the military campaigns of the emperor Napoleon, when Napoleon had dropped the reins of his horse in order to read papers, the horse reared up and nearly unseated him. A corporal of the grenadiers, a very lowly soldier, leaped forward and caught the bridle of the emperor's horse so that in a few seconds he had brought the animal under control. Napoleon turned to the corporal and said, "Thank you, Captain."

"Of what company, sire?" asked the soldier who had just been called a captain.

"Of my guards," answered Napoleon.

In an instant the young man threw aside his musket and walked across the field toward the headquarters of the general's staff, tearing off his corporal's stripes as he went. He took his place among the emperor's officers. Someone asked what he was doing, and he replied that he was a captain of the guards.

"By whose authority?" they asked him.

"By the authority of the emperor," the young man answered.

It all depends upon the authority of the commander involved. If one of the soldier's friends had called him a captain, the two corporals might have had a good laugh together, but that would have been all. The title bestowed by the friend would have meant nothing. However, when the emperor gave the order, the corporal seized upon it instantly and was then received as a captain by the staff. In the same way, our position before God as God's children depends upon the highest authority in the universe, the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, before whom every knee shall bow. And we can be as bold in seizing our rank as Napoleon's soldier was.

Will we step back into the ranks and boast, "Jesus has called me God's child," but fail to assume the privileges and responsibilities of that position? Or will we take him at his word and come to God to enjoy all the privileges of being his own? If you have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and understand this verse properly, then you will come to God as his child with great boldness.

Faith in Christ

At this point someone might say, "That is wonderful. It must be a great privilege to be God's child. But how do I become God's child? How does this special relationship become mine?" The answer, which is the same answer given throughout the New Testament, is that you become a child of God through faith. This means that you must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and also believe that by means of his death and resurrection he is your Savior.

The letter to the Hebrews says: "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6). Romans tells us that "a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Rom. 1:17). Ephesians says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith" (Eph. 2:8). In Romans 10 we read, "If you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (vv. 9-10). It is the same in the opening verses of John's Gospel.

There is one more truth to be seen. When you believe in Jesus Christ there must be also a verbal expression of that belief. The Bible does not acknowledge any such thing as secret discipleship. On the contrary, it teaches that Christ must be professed publicly. The reason, of course, is that verbal testimony indicates the reality of that faith, just as the cry of the newborn child reveals the existence of life to the doctor and the mother. The verses just quoted, Romans 10:9-10, say that if we "confess" with our mouth the Lord Jesus and "believe" in our hearts that

God has raised him from the dead we shall be saved. Confession is proof that belief in the Lord Jesus Christ is genuine.

Have you confessed your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ publicly? One of the most famous characters in the New Testament was a man who came to Jesus by night and held a long conversation with him, yet left Christ's presence without any outward confession of faith. As a result, we do not know whether he was genuinely converted or not. His name was Nicodemus.

Nicodemus came to Jesus as a result of Christ's preaching, as many people travel to hear great preaching today. We know this because he referred to Christ's teaching and miracles in his opening remarks: "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (John 3:2). In other words, he was very impressed. This alone was no evidence of his conversion, however, and Christ's reply to him was in essence a rebuke. The one thing that Jesus was not was a teacher sent from God. There had been thousands of teachers sent from God in the previous history of the world, and there have been thousands of teachers since. He was not one of them. He was God sent to teach, and to die, and to rise again. So he corrected Nicodemus by telling him that unless he was born again, he would never be able to understand things that were spiritual.

Nicodemus was puzzled. "How can a man be born when he is old?" he asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" (v. 4). Jesus answered by showing that the new birth was spiritual and that it would express itself as faith in his death and resurrection.

How much of this entered into the heart of Nicodemus? We do not know, for Nicodemus left no outward expression of his belief. He had heard great preaching, but so have thousands of other unbelievers. Later he would say to the Jewish leaders who were plotting against Jesus, "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" (John 7:51). But many unbelievers have argued for

the due process of law and for civil liberties. We even see him bringing spices to Joseph of Arimathaea in order to embalm the body of Jesus on the day of his crucifixion (John 19:39), but many a guilty, unbelieving conscience has donated a stained-glass window or a chapel to Jesus.

Was he one of God's children? We do not know. His witness to the Lord of glory is missing, and we search in vain for his confession.

How different, on the other hand, is the account John gives us of the woman of Samaria, just one chapter later. Donald Grey Barnhouse, in *Epistle to the Romans,* has pointed out that the contrast between these two personalities is striking. "The one is the story of a man, the other of a woman. The one is seemingly a seeker, the other is found by Christ, almost by accident, but definitely by design. The first was a Jew, the second a Samaritan. The one was an aristocratic Pharisee, the other a village harlot. The one wanted Jesus to talk to him, the woman tried to avoid the probing truth and attempted to change the subject. The one came at midnight, the other at noon."

Both Nicodemus and the woman heard great truths during their conversation with the Lord Jesus, but the effect of his words on them was different. Nicodemus questioned Christ, but he showed no verbal response to Christ's teaching. The woman tried to evade Christ's questions. But at last she believed and thereafter showed signs of her faith and transformation. Who was Jesus? To the woman he was revealed to be God's Messiah. So we read, "Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?'" (John 4:28, 29). We are told that the men then went to Jesus and asked him to remain with them, and that as the result of his words and of the testimony of the woman many others believed in him also.

The importance of public confession arising out of true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can hardly be overestimated. It is true that there is a type of confession that is insincere. It is this type of confession that the apostle James refers to when he speaks of a faith without works that is dead (James 2:20, 26). But there is also a sincere confession that will always

arise out of a life transformed by Jesus. Have you told others of your faith in him?

Chapter 12.
Rebirth

John 1:13

Several years ago I talked to a young man who was experiencing many difficulties in his life. He had difficulties with his family, in his work, and in many of his social relationships. He was at that time involved in an extramarital relationship. As I talked with him I discovered that he tended to blame all his troubles on his background and his birth. According to him the fault lay with his parents, and with his place in society. To this young man I had the opportunity of pointing out that, no matter what his birth may or may not have been, there was always the possibility of a new birth through faith in Jesus Christ.

This great possibility, the possibility of beginning anew, is something that came into the world with the Lord Jesus. It is one of the main themes of John's Gospel. Thus, in John 1:12-13, where John has been speaking of the ones who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ when he came, he adds in the same connection that the ones who received him did so because they had experienced rebirth. He writes that these were "born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:13).

Not of Blood

Before we can speak about the possibilities of the new birth, we need to look first at the ways in which a person cannot be born again. We need to do this to clear away false ideas that hinder our understanding of this aspect of God's truth. Sometimes it is imperative that we do this. If you were a building contractor and wanted to build a twenty-story building in the heart of New York City on a lot that already had a two-story

brownstone on it, you would have to go with your bulldozers to clear away the brownstone before you could erect the higher building. It is the same in theology. Thus, in order to build an enduring structure of God's truth regarding the new birth, it is necessary to clear away the false ideas that some men and women have about it.

One false idea confuses spiritual birth with physical birth—the mistake of Nicodemus (John 3:4). It is the thought that a person can be reborn by means of some human agency. To deny this false premise is the main burden of our text, for the verse tells us that it is "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man"—all human agencies—that a man is reborn, "but of God" (KJV).

We need to look at each of these three negative phrases individually. What does John mean when he says that we are not born into God's family by "blood"? The various commentators on this verse are fairly well agreed that it refers to physical birth. We would not refer to human birth in this way in English idiom, of course, but the reference is a natural one in the thought patterns of Judaism. For instance, in Leviticus 17:11, we read, "For the life of a creature is in the blood." This means that in Jewish thought, to refer to blood was nearly the equivalent of referring to human life. Thus, to deny that spiritual birth comes by blood is to deny that it can come about by any process of human regeneration.

I have said that we would not refer to human birth in this way in English. Yet there is a way of speaking that comes quite close. We speak of a person's "noble blood." Or we call someone a "blue blood," meaning that he comes from a privileged position in society. If we were, therefore, to use this idiom to express our denial of the first of these false ideas, we could say that no one is able to claim a position in God's family on the basis of his relationship to the important people of this earth. Even the children of Martin Luther or John Calvin or John Wesley were not saved on the basis of their family relationships. Kings as well as paupers need to confess with their mouths the Lord Jesus and believe on him with their hearts.

A great example of people believing they are right with God because of their birth is the Jews. In Christ's time they boasted to him of their physical ancestry, saying, "We are children of Abraham." How proud they were of that! Abraham had received the promises and the covenant from God, so they naturally thought they had it made just because they were descended from him physically. Jesus pointed out, however, that God was interested in a spiritual relationship and that they were indicating by their actions that they were really children of the devil.

In what are you trusting for your salvation from sin and for a right relationship with God? This verse was written to teach you that, among other things, you must not make the mistake of trusting in the fact that your parents were Christians, or that you were born in a so-called Christian country. The Bible teaches that nothing that relates to your physical birth will save you.

An Emotional High

The second negative phrase in our text is "nor of the will of the flesh." What does this mean?

Various explanations of this phrase have been given. One of the earliest was that of St.

Augustine, who took the phrase "not of blood" to refer to human birth (as we have already done ourselves), the phrase "nor of the will of the flesh" to refer to the woman's part in reproduction, and "nor of the will of man" to refer to the man's part in procreation. But these last two points seem to me highly unlikely. And so, too, do views that see it as a reference to adoption (Luther), the sensual imagination (Godet), or willpower (Calvin).

The clue to the true meaning of this phrase is to be found in all that is signified by the word "flesh" in the New Testament. The New Testament uses the word "flesh" to signify all that we are in terms of our natural appetites. This involves our emotions. Hence, John is saying that a person cannot become a child of God by exercising his emotions

any more than he can become God's child by being born of privileged parents.

Many people believe themselves to be Christians simply because they get an emotional kick out of attending a certain kind of church service. This comprises much of popular religion today, and it is also a fair description of the kind of mystical religion that is connected with the drug cult. Are such experiences valid? Not according to the teaching of the Bible! The Bible teaches that a surge of the emotions does not produce rebirth. You can be moved to tears in a meeting, but that alone will not transform you into one of God's children.

Not by Determination

There is also a third phrase. For God not only says that those who become his children are not born by blood or by the will of the flesh, they also are not born by the will of man. This means that no one can become a child of God by determination or by the powers of positive thinking.

Someone may say, "But certainly a man can get ahead in life by the power of human determination? In this life, yes, but not spiritually. It is possible for a man with a powerful will to move ahead in this world. He may start from a family that has nothing to offer him either in terms of this world's goods or in basic values or encouragement. He may have no education or skills. Nevertheless, he can set doggedly to work, earning a living by day and going to school at night. In this way he can earn a high school diploma, and later a B.A. or a B.S. When he finishes that, he can use his training to get a good job to earn more money. He can collect a fortune and use his fortune to launch himself in politics. From there, he could move from alderman to mayor, to state senator, to United States congressman, and perhaps even to president! A man can do that by willpower, plus (we must admit it) a little "luck."

In the same way a man can achieve certain things for himself morally and ethically. He can found a new religion. But even this will not make him a child of God. In order to become a child of God a man needs to

be given God's life, and this comes only from God and is imparted to a man only on the basis of God's grace. The Bible says, "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created" (James 1:18). It is true that a person must believe in Jesus Christ in order to become a Christian. John says that Jesus gives power to become children of God "even to them that believe on his name." You must believe. At the same time, however, you must know that if you do believe, it is only because God has already taken the initiative to plant his divine life within you. In other words, you must learn that man never makes the first move toward God and that no one would be saved unless God operated in this way.

God's Children

Moreover, isn't this exactly why the Bible speaks of our conversion to Christ as rebirth? Why does God use this image? He could have said merely that we must gain an intellectual understanding of these things. That would be legitimate in some sense, because an intellectual understanding is part of it. He could have said that we must attain a certain degree of commitment. The idea of commitment is valid. Instead, God, in the Bible, speaks of life—eternal life—and rebirth. Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again." Clearly God uses this image because it alone shows that the initiative lies with the Father entirely and not with the son or the daughter who is engendered.

What did you have to do with your birth? Did you say, "I would like to be a boy and be born to Mr. and Mrs. Smith; they seem like a nice couple"? Did you say, "I'd like to be a girl, five feet, six inches tall, and have blond hair"? Of course, you didn't! You had absolutely nothing to do with it! Instead, your father met your mother and between them they produced you, and you only realized what had happened afterward. It is obvious, therefore, that when God uses this image he does so to show that he alone is responsible for your salvation and that you believe only because he first created the life within you to do it. Many verses support this truth by showing that the basis of our sonship lies in God's electing love. John writes: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us,

that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1). Paul declares that God has "predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:5). James says, "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth" (James 1:18).

There are reasons why God has done things in this manner, of course, and the first reason is simply that we might become aware of God's great love and mercy and serve him because of it. In other words, we are to read a passage like Romans 9:14-16—"What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'"—and we are to say, "Lord God, if it is not of anything human but solely of your mercy that we are saved, then how great is your mercy!" We are to serve him better because of it.

Many people (even Christians) will not like what I am saying because it detracts from man's efforts. But that is exactly the point. The biblical doctrine of rebirth takes everything away from man and gives everything to God. It is the principle of the "seesaw" in theology. It is the principle that you cannot have both ends of the seesaw—God and man—up at the same time. You know how a seesaw operates. When Johnny is at the bottom, Suzie is at the top. And when Suzie is down, Johnny is up. In the same way, you can never have God and man up or down at the same time. If you exalt man in your thinking so that he is able to take care of himself spiritually and eventually inch his way into heaven, then God will be down and there will not be much need for him. But if man is down where he should be and where the Bible places him, dead in trespasses and sins, with a depraved will and utterly without any genuine spiritual potential, then God will be up where he belongs. He will be great and mighty and altogether lovely, as he is. And the Christian, who has come to see these things, will look up from the dung heap of this world, still covered with much of the world's refuse, and say, "Oh, my God, how could you love me?" And when he gets to that point the love of Christ will begin to constrain him, and he will begin to learn that God has set things up this way so that it will be

with the bonds of love and not the whip of the law that we are drawn to holiness through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have this thought stated in the fourth stanza of that great hymn written by Isaac Watts, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross":

> Were the whole realm of nature mine,
> That were a present far too small,
> Love so amazing, so divine,
> Demands my soul, my life, my all.

The Uncommitted

It is a pity that we are not able to give an exposition of the whole Gospel of John at one time, because someone could conceivably stop at this point and go away, saying, "Well, then, there is nothing for us to do at all." But I am not saying exactly that. I am saying that the initiative is with God in salvation, and that no one—absolutely no one!—would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ unless God had taken the first step by planting his own life within those persons. At this point, however, I must add (and, indeed, I will be adding it more and more as we go on in our studies) that when God does take the first step in saving us, we then become what I would call "free spiritual agents" so that thereafter we are able to obey him and follow his leading. By our rebirth we are initiated into an entirely new series of relationships and duties within his family.

No one who has believed on Jesus Christ is to take these doctrines as an excuse for going out and living as he or she pleases. Paul says, "God forbid" that any true child of God should do that. At the same time, it should not be an excuse for spiritual inactivity on the part of the uncommitted either. Every time I come to such themes and preach them I know that there will be some persons who will react by saying, "Well, if the entire initiative is with God in salvation, then I obviously can do nothing. I'll just sit back and wait to see if he will save me." That does not follow. It is true that you cannot give yourself divine life, but you can expose yourself to the claims of the Christian faith and ask God (if there is a God) to reveal himself to you.

Let me make two suggestions. If you have never honestly faced the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ and of Christianity, begin by reading a Gospel. It doesn't really matter which one, but John is an excellent one with which to start. Read it slowly, and ask yourself what kind of a man could speak and act as Jesus did and have the kind of effect he had upon his contemporaries. I can assure you that this will not be wasted motion, because God says that it is through reading the Word that one is converted. The Bible says that we are "born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23).

Second, you can pray. You do not even need to be convinced of God's existence to do this. For you can merely say, "God (if there is a God), I want you to know that I am an honest seeker after the truth concerning you—or at least I would like to be. And I know that I come to spiritual things as if I were blind. Still, I come. I am as open to the truth as I can be. If you exist, I want you to speak to me. And, furthermore, I want you to know that if you do exist and if you convince me that Jesus Christ is really your Son and died for my sin, then I promise to submit myself to him and follow him all the days of my life." That you can do if you are an honest seeker after truth. If you do that, God will already have taken the initiative in saving you and will already be leading you out of darkness into his light.

Chapter 13.
God with Us

John 1:14

I wish it were possible to approach John 1:14 as though reading it for the first time. The verse contains something that was new and quite startling when it was first written, and yet for us who read it nearly two thousand years later it has become commonplace. We read: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory,

the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." This was the great sentence for which the Gospel of John was written. It tells us—inexplicable as it may be—that God became man. Nevertheless, because we have heard that verse from childhood, we read it and are often strangely unmoved.

The Church Fathers

Fortunately, we can capture a sense of the original, shattering newness of this sentence from the writings of the church fathers, particularly those who were converted to Christianity out of paganism. Augustine, who became the greatest theologian of the early church, was no mean scholar. He had drunk deeply at the spring of Platonic philosophy. He had spent years soaking up the religious and philosophical system of the Manichaeans. Yet, as he said later, although he had read all about the Word in non-Christian books—that the Word was God and had been active in the creation of the world—nevertheless, that the "Word became flesh" he had not read there.

Another church father, Junius the younger, has also written of his reaction to first reading these verses. "My father, who was frequently reading the New Testament, and had long observed with grief the progress I had made in infidelity, had put that book in my way in his library, in order to attract my attention, if it might please God to bless his design, though without giving me the least intimation of it. Here, therefore, I unwittingly opened the New Testament thus providentially laid before me. At the very first view, although I was deeply engaged in other thoughts, that grand chapter of the evangelist and apostle presented itself to me—'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God.' I read part of the chapter, and was so affected that I instantly became struck with the divinity of the argument, and the majesty and authority of the composition, as infinitely surpassing the highest flights of human eloquence. My body shuddered. My mind was in amazement, and I was so agitated the whole day that I scarcely knew who I was. Nor did the agitation cease, but continued till it was at last soothed by a humble faith in him who was made flesh and dwelt among us."

This was the astounding new thing—that the Word of God could enter into our history as a man so that men could see him. In him men could behold God's glory.

He Pitched His Tent

Actually, as John wrote this verse he was doubtlessly referring to the great days of Israel's desert wanderings; and he was making the point that, although those days were great days for Israel, in our day something much better has happened. It involves all men. We know that John was making this contrast, because of an unusual word that occurs in the verse. In English it is the word "dwelling." We have it in the phrase, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Literally, the phrase means "to dwell in a tent." So we could also translate the verse: "The Word became flesh, and pitched his tent among us," or "The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us." This last translation is particularly significant because the word refers beyond any question to the portable wilderness tabernacle or temple of the Hebrew nation. The tabernacle was the center of their worship and the most important single object in their camp.

In all, the tabernacle was about forty-five feet long and about fifteen feet wide; that is, it was three times as long as it was wide. And it was divided into two distinct parts, the inner section being in the form of a square fifteen feet by fifteen feet, and the outer section being twice as long as it was wide. It was made of boards covered with curtains. The inner chamber contained the ark of the covenant. The outer chamber contained the golden altar of incense, the table of shewbread, and the golden candlestick. This entire structure stood in a courtyard surrounded by curtains of pure linen rising to a height of over eight feet. The courtyard measured 175 feet long and about 87 feet wide. In the courtyard there was a great brazen altar for sacrifices and a laver for purifications.

Everything about the tabernacle—its dimensions, furnishings, colors, functions, and arrangement—was designed to communicate spiritual truth. Hence, many of its functions were previews of the functions Jesus

Christ would fulfill when he eventually pitched his tent among us. We can list several of the more obvious parallels.

1. The tabernacle was *the center of Israel's camp.* We see this in the laws ordering the distribution of the various tribes in the Jewish encampment as recorded in the early chapters of the Book of Numbers. On the eastern side of the tabernacle were the tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. These set out first when the nation began to break camp. On the south were Reuben, Simeon, and Gad. These marched second. After these tribes came the Levites, who surrounded the tabernacle in the encampment. Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin were on the west. Dan, Asher, and Naphtali always camped to the north. These came last when the people were on the move. We see this position of the tabernacle reinforced by the instructions given to the Levites for their place in the march; for we read in Numbers 2:17, "Then the Tent of Meeting and the camp of the Levites will set out in the middle of the camps. They will set out in the same order as they encamp, each in his own place under his standard." This is highly significant in reference to Jesus Christ, for he is the center of the Christian encampment. He is our gathering place. This is why Jesus could say, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself (John 12:32). He told his disciples: "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matt. 18:20).

2. The tabernacle was *the place where the law of Moses was preserved.* The first two tables of stone, which had been given to Moses by God, were broken (Exodus 32); but the second set was deposited in the ark of the covenant within the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle for safekeeping. This also speaks to us of Christ Jesus. Speaking of his perfect obedience to God and of his perfect keeping of the law, the Lord Jesus Christ said, "for I always do what pleases him" (John 8:29). In the same manner Psalm 40 is prophesying Christ's perfect obedience when it reports him as

saying, "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:8).

3. The tabernacle was *the dwelling place of God.* This was no doubt largely symbolic during the Old Testament period, although it was symbolized in a very striking way. Within the Holy of Holies, between the wings of the cherubim that stretched out over the covering of the ark of the covenant, there was the shekinah glory that symbolized God's presence. The shekinah was what we would call "light." At times it was hidden by the cloud that spread out over the tabernacle. At other times it flashed out in judgment against some evil in the camp of Israel. The glory within the Holy of Holies symbolized the presence of God. Thus, John, who knew that God had been revealed in the flesh in Jesus, could write, "We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father."

4. Because the tabernacle was the place where God dwelt among his people, it was also *the place of revelation.* It was the place where God met with men and spoke to them. For this reason the tabernacle was also called "the tent of meeting," a phrase that occurs scores of times in the Old Testament.

The second tabernacle, Jesus Christ, is the place where God meets with men today and speaks to them. If you have ever visited a mint, you know that the coins manufactured there are produced by large presses that stamp out a whole sheet of coins at one time. A sheet of silver or alloy is fed into the machine, there is a clump, and a shower of coins tumbles out into a basket. I am told that a skilled engraver can take a coin, examine it under a magnifying glass, and tell not only the actual die from which the coin came but even the condition of the die, which cannot be seen where it is within the press. It is on the basis of such an examination that the dies are replaced when they show signs of wear. In the same way, we cannot see God. The Bible reports God as saying to Moses: "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Exod. 33:20). Yet God is revealed to us perfectly in Jesus, in whom we

see the Father. The Bible tells us that, like the coin from the mint, he is the "exact representation" of God's invisible person (Heb. 1:3).

5. The tabernacle was also *the place where sacrifices were made.* In the outer court of the tabernacle, on the east side near the only opening into the courtyard, stood the brazen altar on which sacrifices burned continually. For anyone approaching the tabernacle from outside, this was the first of the furnishings of the tabernacle seen by him. This was significant, for it indicated that there is no approach to God except by means of the sacrifice. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness [of sin]" (Heb. 9:22; cf. Lev. 17:11). In the same way, today there is no approach to God except through faith in the sacrifice provided by Jesus Christ, who in the tabernacle of his flesh offered himself up on Calvary.

This is the answer to the supreme question of man in all ages of human history. It is far more important than any scientific question or political question. How can a sinful man, corrupt by nature, approach a holy God? We all need God, but how can we find him? How can we come close enough to him to understand him? How can we become acceptable before him? How can we know forgiveness for sin? How can we know God's peace? How can we find fellowship with the One in whom we live and move and have our being? The answer is in the tabernacle and in the Christ whom the tabernacle prefigures. At the cross of Christ the perfect sacrifice is performed; Jesus dies in our place. He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. On the basis of his sacrifice, we who were once children of wrath have now become God's children and can approach God the Father.

6. Finally, the tabernacle was *the place where the people of Israel worshiped.* We worship in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ today. The people of Israel brought their sacrifices to the tabernacle, gave their gifts there, and asked their questions. On occasion they were summoned to hear the voice of God. Their priests ministered in the temple enclosure. In the same way, we gather around the person of our Lord, who regulates our worship

and receives our homage. It is through Jesus alone that we have access by one Spirit unto the Father (Eph. 2:18).

Thou art the Way: to thee alone
From sin and death we flee;
And he who would the Father seek
Must seek him, Lord by thee.

Thou art the Truth:
Thy word alone True wisdom can impart;
Thou only canst inform the mind,
And purify the heart.

Thou art the Life; the rending tomb
Proclaims thy conquering arm,
And those who put their trust in thee
Nor death nor hell shall harm.

Thou art the Way, the Truth and the Life:
Grant us that Way to know,
That Truth to keep, that Life to win, Whose joys eternal flow.

Christ's Glory Beheld

The final point of our study is that when Jesus Christ pitched his tent among us, he did so in order that men and women might see him and thus come to know God. John indicates this when he observes: "And we beheld his glory."

This happened in a very literal way with the first disciples about whom John is certainly speaking in this verse, for they saw the glory of Jesus during the days of his flesh. We must not miss the point that John has constructed his account of the first momentous week in the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ to emphasize this great truth. Beginning with the nineteenth verse of this chapter, John begins an account of the most important events of seven consecutive days, beginning with the day on which John the Baptist received the delegation of priests and Levites from Jerusalem and ending on the day in which Jesus changed the water into wine at Cana of Galilee in the presence of his disciples. Significantly enough, the story of the wedding (and therefore also the

story of the events of this first week) ends with the statement: "This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him" (John 2:11). This was the reason for his coming. He came that men might see his glory and believe on him.

It is also true, however, that the experience of the early disciples is duplicated in all who believe in the Lord of glory today, for Paul writes of the experience of all Christians when he says that "we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Is that your experience? Have you beheld the glory of the eternal Son of God who tabernacled among us and who is revealed to us today by means of his Holy Spirit? If it is, then you are called upon to bear a witness to him, as John and the other disciples did. Can you testify to what he has done for you and in your life? I can testify to what Christ has done for me. I look at the second chapter of Ephesians and find myself placed among those who were "dead in ... transgressions and sins ... gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts" but of whom it can now be said, "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions" (Eph. 6:16). He lifted my vision to see Christ, who is altogether lovely, and has drawn me toward himself with bonds of love, so that now I seek to serve him and exalt his name before men.

You say, "Is that something special?" Not at all. It is merely the experience of every true believer. To the giving of such a testimony each of us is called. What a vision! The glory of Jesus Christ! What a task! To make him known to a darkened and sinful world!

Chapter 14.

Grace and Truth

John 1:14

Dr. Francis Schaeffer, founder of the L'Abri Fellowship in Switzerland, tells a story about a prominent American government leader. He had been invited to address a group of student leaders in Washington and had chosen to speak on the theme of restoring values in our culture.
When he had finished there was a moment of silence. Then one student arose—a man from Harvard University—and asked, "Sir, upon what base do you build your values?" It was a brilliant question but a tragic moment for the speaker, for he simply looked down and replied, "I do not know." Here was a man who was calling upon the youth of America to return to a system of moral values, but he was offering them nothing to build upon. As Dr. Schaeffer remarks, he was a man trying to tell his hearers not to steal the company funds and run off to Morocco and yet giving no reason why they should not.

We miss the point of the illustration if we think that the experience of the speaker was unique. It is not unique at all. In fact, it is typical of millions of persons in our day who earnestly want to believe in a system of values and yet have no real basis for their beliefs. They are confused about life. They do not know what is right or wrong, true or false. They want to believe that there is a thing called truth. They want to believe that there is a God who is full of love and is gracious. They want to believe that life has meaning. But they have no valid basis for any of these beliefs. To these people the Bible speaks with special relevance when it says that there is a basis for the demands of ethics, belief in goodness, and truth.

What is the basis? This is the point of what is perhaps the most important theological statement in John's Gospel, the statement contained in the verse that we have already been considering: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The verse states that Jesus Christ is the

basis on which we can know that God is good and that the universe has meaning.

God's Grace

The first thing that John says was revealed in Jesus Christ was grace, God's grace. Because of this we know that God is gracious. What is grace? Grace is simply the unmerited favor of God toward humanity. The New Scofield Bible says, "Grace is the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man." Dr. Harry A. Ironside wrote, "Grace is the very opposite of merit. ...Grace is not only undeserved favor, but it is favor shown to the one who has deserved the very opposite." The Bible expresses it when it says that "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). In other words, God is gracious toward us, not on the basis of what we have done but solely because it is his nature to be gracious.

In one sense, of course, all men are recipients of God's grace. That is what theologians have called "common grace." When the human race sinned in Adam, the entire race came under judgment. The race deserved nothing. God did not owe it anything. If God had simply taken Adam and Eve in the moment they had sinned and cast them into the lake of fire, he would still have been just; and the angels could still have sung,

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is , and is to come.

Revelation 4:8

Moreover, if God had allowed the race to increase to an extent similar to what it has increased to today, and then had brushed it aside into everlasting torment and judgment, God would have been just even then. This is a most important truth. God does not owe man anything. Consequently, all the blessings that people enjoy are the result of God's grace.

Let me put this as clearly as I am able to before we move on. If you are not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are a recipient of God's common grace whether you acknowledge it or not. If you enjoy good health, that is common grace. If you are not on the poverty rolls but instead enjoy the comfort of a home and plenty to eat, that is common grace. If you have a good job and are able to hold it down because of your natural abilities and hard work, that is common grace. The list could be endless. There is no person living who has not been the recipient of God's common grace in some way. If you think that it is not of grace that you receive your blessings but that you deserve them, you are merely showing your ignorance of spiritual things.

Yet, if such grace is wonderful, the grace that is shown in Jesus Christ is even more wonderful. This is "saving grace," for this is a grace that does not spare men merely for a certain limited time; it redeems them for time and eternity. It transforms them from what the Bible calls "children of wrath" into God's sons.

A great example of such a transformation is John Newton. In his very early years Newton had been raised in a Christian home in England; but his parents died when he was only six years old and he was sent to live with an unbelieving relative. There Christianity was mocked, and he was abused. Finally, to escape these conditions, Newton ran away to sea, joining the British navy. He fell into gross sin; it gained a hold on him. He eventually deserted the navy and went to one of the worst areas of Africa. As he tells it, he went there for only one purpose and that was "to sin his fill."

In Africa Newton fell in with a Portuguese slave trader. When the trader went away on slavehunting expeditions, as he often did, the power in the compound passed to the slave trader's African wife. She hated white men and took out her venom on Newton. He was cruelly abused, so much so that at times he was forced to eat his food off the dusty floor like a dog.

After a time Newton fled from the compound and made his way to the coast, where he signaled a slave ship. The captain of the ship was

disappointed at first when he learned that Newton had no ivory to sell. But when he found that Newton could navigate a vessel, he made Newton a shipmate. Even then Newton got into trouble. One day he broke into the ship's supply of rum and got so drunk that he fell overboard and would have drowned if an officer had not saved him by thrusting a harpoon into his thigh and hauling him back into the ship. The harpoon made such a wound that years later Newton could still put his hand into the fist-sized opening.

Near the end of one voyage, as they were nearing Scotland, the ship ran afoul of bad weather, was blown off course, and began to sink. Newton was sent down into the hold to work the pumps. He was terrified. He thought surely the ship would sink and he would drown. For days he worked the pumps, and as he pumped the water out of the hold he began to cry out to God. Bible verses about God's love and the death of Christ that he had heard as a child and thought he had forgotten came to his memory, and as he remembered them he was miraculously transformed. He was born again. When the storm had passed and he was again in England, he went on to become a highly educated preacher and teacher of the Word of God in that country, even preaching before the queen. It was of this storm and this conversion that William Cowper, the poet, wrote:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Newton himself, who, through this experience, became in England a great proclaimer of God's grace, declared:

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind but now I see.

Newton was a great preacher of grace, and the fact is not at all surprising. For he had learned, as all Christians have learned, that God is exceedingly gracious. He had been assured of this as he had thought upon the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ through whom God's grace is known.

Truth

The second aspect of God's nature that John speaks of in this verse is truth. John tells us that this too is revealed in Jesus Christ. Truth is a great word in John's writings. In all it occurs about twenty-four times. This is the first reference, and in almost every case (including this one) it is related to the character of God.

We find this in the rest of the Bible also. For instance, we read in Deuteronomy and Isaiah that God is truth (Deut. 32:4; Isa. 65:16). We read that God desires truth in our inward parts (Ps. 51:6). We are told that the Lord hates a lying tongue (Prov. 6:17). Jesus declared that he was himself the truth: "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). He spoke of the Word of God as the truth (John 17:17). When we put all these statements together we find that God the Father is truth, that God the Son is truth, that God the Holy Spirit is truth, and that everything that takes its nature from God is also characterized by truth. In other words, truth is of the character of God. We who are Christians must, therefore, for that very reason, take our stand upon it.

We do not deal with the opinions of men when we deal with Christian doctrine. We deal with truth. Thus, a person's eternal destiny depends upon his relationship to the eternal truth in Jesus Christ.

I have been impressed by the extent to which we have seen the opposite of this in our day. That is, we have entered a period of history in which truth is supposed to be relative and in which no system of ideas is recognized by the majority of all men to be binding. I am impressed too by the fact that all the great present-day apologists have seen this.

One man who has been pointing this out is Francis A. Schaeffer. He points out that people no longer believe in truth. They did believe in truth before the impact of the philosophy of Hegel. In that day, if one fact was true, the opposite of that fact was believed to be false. There was antithesis, and what was true or false then was believed to be true or false forever. After Hegel, the idea grew that reality was to be represented not by what is true as opposed to what is false but rather by

what is true *now* or, worse yet, by what is true only for the *individual.* Under this system *my* truth is not necessarily *your* truth, and what is true for me *now* may not be true for me *tomorrow.*

"But what does that mean for our day?" you may ask. The answer is that we are dealing with truth, real truth, when we present the claims of Jesus Christ and of Christianity. What happens most often when you testify to the saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ today? Isn't it true that the most common reaction is simply: "Fine; that's good for you. I'm glad it helps you, but, after all, what you say is only relatively true. If something else helps me, then that is perfectly valid also." This is the view we need to fight against.

C. S. Lewis is another Christian apologist who saw the changing attitudes toward truth. Here is an example of his insight from the first of *The Screwtape Letters,* in which a senior devil named Screwtape gives some basic instruction to a junior tempter named Wormwood: "I note what you say about guiding your patient's reading and taking care that he sees a good deal of his materialist friend. But are you not being a trifle naive? It sounds as if you supposed that *argument* was the way to keep him out of Enemy's clutches. That might have been so if he had lived a few centuries earlier. At that time the humans still knew pretty well when a thing was proved and when it was not; and if it was proved they really believed it. They still connected thinking with doing and were prepared to alter their way of life as the result of a chain of reasoning. But what with the weekly press and other such weapons we have largely altered that. Your man has been accustomed, ever since he was a boy, to have a dozen incompatible philosophies dancing about together inside his head. He doesn't think of doctrines as primarily 'true' or 'false,' but as 'academic' or 'practical,' 'outworn' or 'contemporary,' 'conventional' or 'ruthless.' Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him from the Church."

That is true. For today, even in the books of theology, we are presented with the idea that Christian doctrine is not so much true as it is helpful. And the conclusion is that you can take it or leave it, sift it or drop it, all

according to its practical value to you personally. This is diabolical. It is not the philosophical basis of Christianity.

Instead, when you come to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, you come to a declaration that certain things are really true for all time, whatever they may mean to you personally. And furthermore, we are told that it is on the basis of such truth that you as an individual will be forced to give a reckoning.

You say, "But what are these truths?" Let me give you a summary. First, there is the truth about man. We have been hearing for generations that man is doing better and better, and that given time enough things will turn out all right and all his problems will be solved. How foolish! Given enough time things will turn out exactly as they have been turning out since the beginning of the world. The reason for this is that there is something wrong in the heart of man. The Bible calls it sin. It may also be called rebellion, selfishness, pride, or any number of similar words. It is the same principle. The truth about man is that man carries his greatest problem about within him.

People always want to blame someone else, even the devil. There is a wonderful story about a little girl called Mary Ann who one day got into a fight with her brother. The mother stopped the fighting by yanking Mary up sharply and sitting her down in a corner. She asked, "Mary Ann, why did you let the devil put it into your heart to pull your brother's hair and kick his shins?" Mary Ann thought a minute and then said, "Well, maybe the devil did put it into my head to pull brother's hair, but kicking his shins was my own idea." That was tremendous theology, and it shows what is wrong with the world. It is not what the devil, the environment, or our history makes us do that makes the world such a bad place, but it is what *we* do. The truth about the problems of man is that man himself is the problem.

The second truth that we receive from Christianity is the truth about God. This is most necessary, for there are profound misconceptions about him. People think of God as removed, arbitrary, unconcerned, indulgent. But God declares that he is love and truth and justice and that

he cares enough about men and women to die for them in order to bring them back to himself.

There is the truth about the atonement. People look to the death of Jesus and call it an example of a man who was deluded but who meant well. Others call it a tragedy. Some call it a demonstration of outstanding courage. That is not what the atonement means. It is true that there are aspects of Christ's death that relate to us as a moving example. Peter writes to encourage those who were suffering from persecution in his day, saying, "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example" (1 Peter 2:21). But even as he says this he takes pains to point out the real meaning of the death of Christ by showing that it was essentially a death for others. "Christ suffered *for you*." And he immediately adds, as if to give that meaning, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24). That is the truth about the atonement. Christ died for us in order that "whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Do you believe these things? The truth about them did not come to the world through philosophy or through any other form of human speculation. Truth came into the world through Jesus Christ. It is recorded for men in the Bible. Your eternal destiny will depend upon the way you respond to it and upon whether or not you will commit yourself to Jesus Christ. Will you do it? To do it is to learn that God is indeed gracious and to uncover the only valid basis for truth and sound morality.

Chapter 15.
The Unique Christ

John 1:15-18

In France every child who goes to Sunday school learns John 3:16, as children do the world over. He recites it like this: "*Car Dieu a tant aimé*

le monde qu'il a donné son Fils unique." Literally translated this means: "For God loved the world so much that he gave his *unique* Son." Unique means being without a like or equal, single in kind or excellence, matchless. It is an important word, and it is particularly important at just this point in our study since it occurs twice in the space of five verses. In Greek the word is *monogenes*; the New International Version says "One and Only"; the French say *unique*. In each case, however, the same teaching is in view.

In verse 14 John speaks of having beheld Christ's glory, "the glory of the *One and Only,* who came from the Father." In verse 18 we are told, "No one has ever seen God, but God the *One and Only,* who is at the Father's side, has made him known." We see at once, then, that Jesus is unique because there is no one quite like him (in fact, with the exception of the Father himself, not at all like him) and because he can do for men what no one else can do.

Jesus is unique in every aspect of his being. He is unique in his person, birth, doctrine, works, miracles, death, resurrection, and future triumphs. In the verses that are included within these two uses of the word in John's first chapter (vv. 15-18), four things are singled out particularly: (1) Jesus is unique in his origins; (2) he is unique as the channel of God's blessings; (3) he is unique as the source of grace and truth; and (4) he is unique because he is the only one in whom you and I may see God. We need to look at each of these carefully.

Unique in His Origin

In the first place, Jesus Christ is unique in his origins, for John the Baptist, who is actually speaking these words, declares, "'This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me'" (v. 15).

It is possible on a theoretical level at least that this verse could have three meanings. William Barclay points out that since Jesus was actually six months younger than John, the Baptist could be saying, "He who is my junior in age has been advanced before me." John could also

be saying, "I was in the field before Jesus, I occupied the center of the stage before he did; my hand was laid to the work before his was; but all that I was doing was to prepare the way for his coming; I was only the advance guard of the main force and the herald of the king. "John could have been saying either of those two things. But in actual fact it is highly unlikely that these were any more than fleeting thoughts in his mind. John the Baptist was impressed with the uniqueness of Christ's person, and the phrase should therefore mean (as the evangelist intends it to mean) that Jesus was entirely without historical origins. He was preexistent. This is clearly the equivalent of declaring him to be God.

Unique in his origins! How exalted this makes the Lord Jesus! Donald Grey Barnhouse has written in *The Cross through the Open Tomb:* "The history of every other human being begins at birth: but the Lord Jesus Christ exists eternally as the Second Person of the Godhead. Before He was born at Bethlehem, He lived; He was one with the Father in essence and being. Before He came to earth as a baby, He walked among men and revealed Himself to them. The Old Testament, which was completed four centuries before His birth, contains many stories of His appearing among men before He came as babe, child, and man." Abraham saw Christ in his day; for Jesus declared, "Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). He later added, "before Abraham was born, I am" (v. 58). Isaiah saw Jesus when he had his vision of the Lord high and lifted up (vsa. 6:1-3), for John refers to this vision, saying, "Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him" (John 12:41). There were others.

It is no wonder, therefore, that in almost every instance in which the writers of the New
Testament refer in depth to Christ's person they refer almost instinctively to his preexistence. The author of Hebrews begins by writing: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Heb. 1:12). Paul in the Book of Philippians writes: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ

Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:5-8).

Some people consider Jesus Christ only a man, and indeed he is a man. Some point to him only as an example, and he is that also. But if that is all you can see in Jesus Christ, then your view of him is entirely misleading. For the first and most important thing to be said about him is that he is without any historical beginnings and that this is the equivalent of calling him God. Everything he did and said takes its meaning from this great truth and flows from it.

Source of All Blessings

The second point made in these verses is that Jesus is the unique channel of all God's material and spiritual blessings. This is what is meant when we are told, "From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another" (v. 16).

On one level this verse is a statement that all men have been recipients of God's grace. This is "common grace," the type of grace discussed previously. Everything truly good that comes into your life—health, prosperity, knowledge, friendships, good times, whatever it is—comes from God. This is true whether or not you recognize him as the source of such blessings.

In the Book of Hosea there is a story that illustrates this truth. Hosea was a preacher, and God had told Hosea to marry a woman who was to prove unfaithful to him. He was to do this as an illustration of the relationship between God and Israel because God had taken Israel to himself as a wife and she had proved unfaithful spiritually. The object and goal of the illustration was that Hosea was to remain faithful to her and love her, even after she had left him, because God remains faithful even when people turn from him to serve other gods.

The time came, some years after Hosea's wife had left, that she fell into poverty and ended up living with a man who no longer had enough money to take care of her. At this point God said, "Hosea, I want you to go down to the marketplace and buy the things she needs, because that is the way I do with my people. They run away from me, and I pay the bills." So we read in Hosea, "Their mother has been unfaithful and has conceived them in disgrace. She said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.' ...She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold" (Hos. 2:5, 8). So it is! We run from God, but he pays the bills; he still takes care of us. He takes care of you. We need to learn that Jesus Christ is unique as the source of all material and spiritual blessings, even when we fail to acknowledge his goodness or thank him for them.

There is another sense in which Jesus is the source of all blessing, however. He himself is a blessing; and the true Christian—not the non-Christian—has an opportunity to be enriched by him personally. We are apt to tire of his presence because of the sin in us and to be lured by the pleasures of the world. The world does have pleasures. The trouble is simply that they do not satisfy us long or satisfy us completely. They are much like a Chinese dinner: you eat it, it tastes good, but an hour later you are hungry again. Jesus Christ is not like that. He said, "If you are thirsty, come to me and I will give you satisfying water. If you are hungry come to me; I am the bread of life. He who drinks of me and feeds on me will never hunger and never thirst." Have you done that? Are you doing that today?

If you have once known the Lord Jesus Christ and have turned back to the world's pleasure for a time, I guarantee that the world will prove increasingly insipid and empty to you. One hymnwriter knew this experience at one point in his life, and he has left us a poignant verse about it. He wrote:

How tedious and tasteless
the hours When Jesus no

longer I see!
Sweet prospects, sweet birds, and
sweet flowers, Have all lost their
sweetness for me!

Is that your experience? It need not be, for you can turn to Christ again and find him truly satisfying. Another hymn writer composed a verse which tells the other side of the story.

Hast thou heard Him, seen Him, known Him?
Is not thine a captured heart?
Chief among ten thousand
own Him, Joyful, choose
the better part.
What has stript the
seeming beauty From
the idols of the earth?
not a sense of right or duty,
But the sight of peerless worth.
Draw and win and fill
completely, Till the
cup o'er flow the
brim;
What have we to do
with idols Who
have companied
with Him?

Jesus! Unique in his origins, unique as the source of all material and spiritual blessings.

Knowledge of God

Finally, in verses 17 and 18 the apostle John records two other things about the uniqueness of Jesus. First, he says that Jesus is unique as the source of grace and truth. "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (v. 17).

This verse suggests a contrast that gives the words "grace and truth" a slightly different meaning than they had three verses earlier. The contrast is between the law with all its regulations and the new era of salvation by grace through faith apart from the works of the law that has come with Jesus Christ. It is a great contrast. Under the law, God demands righteousness from people; under grace, he gives it to people. Under law, righteousness is based on Moses and good works; under grace, it is based on Christ and Christ's character. Under law, blessings accompany obedience; under grace, God bestows his blessings as a free gift. The law is powerless to secure righteousness and life for a sinful race. Grace came in its fullness with Christ's death and resurrection to make sinners righteous before God.

Then, in the last place, we are told that the Lord Jesus Christ is unique because he is the only One in whom you and I may see God. John puts it like this: "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (v. 18).

No one in the ancient world would have disagreed with the first part of that statement—"No one has ever seen God"—for, as William Barclay notes in his commentary, "In the ancient world men were fascinated and depressed and frustrated by what they regarded as the infinite distance and the utter unknowability of God. ...Xenophanes had said, 'Guesswork is over all.' Plato had said, 'Never man and God can meet.' Celsus had laughed at the way that the Christians called God 'Father,' because 'God is away beyond everything.' At the best, Apuleius said, men could catch a glimpse of God as a lightning flash lights up a dark night—one split second of illumination, and then the dark." Even the Jews would have thought this way, for they knew that God had spoken to Moses in the Old Testament, saying, 'You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Exod. 33:20). There would have been no disagreement at all when John the Baptist declared that no one could see God.

Yet John did not stop with that statement. It is true that no man can see God and live, as God said to Moses; but it is also true that in Christ God came to men in a way that enabled men to know him. In Jesus Christ

the character of God may be known. There is no true knowledge of God apart from him. Do you want to believe that God is loving? Good! But do not base your belief on some fantasy of your imagination. What could be less reliable than that? Instead, base it on the revelation of God's love in Christ and at Calvary. Do you want to believe that God is powerful, able to bring a transformation in your life? If so, do not depend on your own wishful thinking. Look to Jesus Christ. He will reveal it; because the same One who died for your sin also rose again in power and now lives to apply that same death-conquering power to the lives of those who follow him. Are you searching for wisdom? Look to the One who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our "righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30).

Three Problems

What is your reaction to these things? Do you know the truth of them personally? One of the most memorable sermons that I have ever come across was preached by the late Emil Brunner at the Fraumünster Kirche in Zurich, Switzerland. It was based on the phrase "faith, hope, and love." The points were these. Every man has a past, a present, and a future. Every man has a problem in his past, a problem in his present, and a problem in his future. The problem in our past is sin, but God has an answer to that problem. The answer is faith, faith in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The problem in our future is death, but God has an answer to that problem also. The answer to that problem is hope, hope in Christ's return based on the fact of his historical resurrection and his promises. The problem in our present is hate, and God's answer to that problem is love. It is the love of Christ lived out in the lives of those who trust him.

Brunner was entirely right. And he was right not only in highlighting the three great problems; he was right in pointing to the unique Christ as the answer. Has Christ become the answer to the problems in your life? He is the only One who will ever answer them completely.

Chapter 16.
How to Witness for Jesus Christ

John 1:19-28

We come now to the first major division in the Gospel of John. The material of the prologue goes through verse 18. With verse 19 the reader is launched at last into the events of the first momentous week of Jesus' ministry.

In all, seven days are involved, beginning with the day John the Baptist met with the delegation that had come to him from Jerusalem and ending with the day Jesus attended the wedding in Cana. On the first day (vv. 19-28), John the Baptist confesses that he is not the Messiah; that is, he denies that he possesses any independent importance of his own. On the second day (vv. 2934) John identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God, for whom he had come to prepare the way. On the third day (vv. 35-39), John's testimony causes two of his own disciples to follow Jesus. On the fourth day (vv. 40-42), one of these disciples, Andrew, finds his own brother, Peter, and brings him to Jesus. On the fifth day (vv. 43-51), Jesus calls Philip, and Philip calls Nathanael. The journey to Galilee occurs on the sixth day. The seventh day (2:1-11) centers around Jesus, his mother, and his disciples at the wedding.

In no other Gospel are the marks of the passing of time so clearly noted as in John. And what is perhaps even more significant, in no other Gospel are the opening events of the narrative fraught with such lasting significance.

The very fact that the tone of the Gospel changes at this point means that our handling of it must change also. Up to verse 19 we have been studying the Gospel almost verse by verse, and the eighteen verses we have considered so far have required no less than fifteen separate studies. From this point on we will move faster. In five studies we will cover the remaining half of the first chapter to see what it teaches about the way a believer can witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. We will then

return to the same general ground in four more studies to uncover the teaching of the chapter about baptism. Finally, we will return once more to pick up several of the themes remaining.

In this study we begin with the witness of John the Baptist to the Lord Jesus Christ, and ask the question: How can a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ witness for him? This is an important question, particularly since the writer of the Gospel so obviously had it in mind as he composed this narrative section.

Chosen to Witness

I suppose that the greatest mistake a person can make as he reads about the witness of John the Baptist is to think that the task of the witness was somehow peculiar to John. No doubt there are many who think this, just as there are many who think that the task of witnessing today should be fulfilled primarily by ministers. But this is an error, and a serious one at that. Witnessing is every Christian's job. When Jesus Christ spoke to his disciples, saying, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (John 15:16), it was evident that salvation consisted not so much in the fact that they had chosen him but that he had chosen them and commissioned them and us to the task of telling others about him.

An acceptance of this task was, many believe, the single most important factor in the astounding outreach and expansion of the early Christian church. It was not simply that Paul and the other leaders carried the gospel to the farthest corners of the Roman world. In fact, many of the early leaders were not particularly zealous about the missionary effort. It was rather that all Christians—small and great, rich and poor, slaves and freedmen—made it their consuming passion to tell others about the Lord.

Tertullian, writing slightly before and after the year a.d. 200, declared in his *Apology: "*We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you—cities, islands, fortresses, towns, marketplaces, the very camp, tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum—we have left nothing to

you but the temples of your gods." How did this happen? Gibbon suggests how in the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* noting that in the early church "it became the most sacred duty of a new convert to diffuse among his friends and relations the inestimable blessing which he had received." Harnack, the church historian, declared in his *Expansion of Christianity:* "We cannot hesitate to believe that the great mission of Christianity was in reality accomplished by means of informal missionaries. Justin says so quite explicitly."

Informal missionaries! That is what the early Christians were; it is what all Christians should be.

Moreover, when John the evangelist tells us in thirtythree verses of the first great witness to the Lord Jesus Christ and of its effect upon Christ's first followers, it is evident that he does so that we might be encouraged by the account and instructed in the matter of our own "informal" witnessing.

The Witness of John

We have already seen in an earlier study that the evangelist has a specific outline in mind as he presents these events from John's ministry. The outline is given to us in verses 6-9: "There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light." If we outline these verses, we see at once that they contain three statements about John the Baptist's testimony: (1) he was not the Light but (2) was sent to bear witness to that Light in order that (3) all men through him might believe. This outline is then followed quite closely in the narrative section of the chapter. Thus, in verses 19-28 we have John denying that he is the Light; that is, that he has any personal, independent importance. In verses 29-34 we have him bearing witness to the Light, a section that concludes with the formal statement: "I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God." Finally, the remainder of the chapter shows the results of John's testimony as the first disciples begin to believe in Jesus.

No doubt there are many other important things that can be said about witnessing for Jesus Christ. Yet I believe that if only these three points are followed, the witness of any Christian, no matter how halting it may be, will be effective. First, the believer must recognize in the depths of his being that he is not the answer to other people's problems, that *he* is not the Light. Second, he must know that Jesus is the Light and must point men to him. Third, he must do it with the express intention of having men and women believe. Sometimes we hear that it is only the giving of a testimony that is important, not the results. But this is not entirely right. It is true that we cannot produce the results. That is God's job. So, in a sense we are not responsible for them. Nevertheless, we must want them and look for them just as earnestly as a man who pulls the fire alarm anxiously awaits the evacuation of the building.

The Workman's Voice

The evangelist begins, then, by telling us of John's confession that he was not the Christ. The section begins with the sentence: "Now this was John's testimony." If we were composing the Gospel today, this phrase would be a subheading, or what we might call a chapter title. It indicates that we are beginning a new and important section of the narrative.

The story goes on in verses 19-23: "Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, 'I am not the Christ.' They asked him, 'Then who are you? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Finally they said, 'Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'I am the voice of one calling in the desert, "Make straight the way for the Lord."'" These verses anchor the testimony of John firmly in the context of first-century Judaism, just as our testimony (if it is to be effective) must be anchored in our own century.

The delegation from Jerusalem could think of three things that John might claim to be, and the first of these quite obviously was "the

Messiah." Was he the Messiah? We must remember as we read these words that the Jews were a people living under the dominion of Rome and that they were looking with great expectation for their deliverer, as any captive people do. If we want a feeling of this from our own time, we need only think of the Philippines under Japanese rule during World War II. At the start of the war General Douglas MacArthur had been in the Philippines, but he had been forced to abandon his base there in the face of the Japanese attack. As he left, however, he gave a speech in which he uttered a promise. The promise was: "I shall return." It was a simple promise. MacArthur was not even a Filipino. Yet, this promise sustained the island people during the days of the occupation as they waited for their deliverance. In fact, they remember MacArthur by these words today. In the same way, the Jews of John's day waited for the deliverer that had been promised to them in the Old Testament.

Moreover, there had been many messianic pretenders. We know of some of them through such works as the *Antiquities* of Josephus or his account of *The Jewish War.* Other false messiahs are mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 5:36-37; 21:38). It would have been easy for John, who by this time had received quite an impressive following, to have announced that he was the Messiah. But not only did he reject the temptation, he even rejected it with the hint that the One who actually was the Messiah was present. By this time he knew that Jesus was there, for the baptism of Jesus by John must have taken place before the events that John the evangelist narrates. Hence, when he rejects the title "Messiah," John does so by emphasizing the first person pronoun "I." It occupies a prominent place in the Greek text. It is as though John had said, "*I* am not the Messiah, but the One who is the Messiah stands among you."

The delegation of priests and Levites next asked him whether he was Elijah. Why should they have asked him this? The answer is that the Jews of John's time believed that the prophet Elijah would appear on earth once more before the coming of the Messiah. This idea is evident from several passages in the Gospels. For instance, in Matthew 16 there is an account of Christ asking the disciples, "Who do people say the Son

of Man is?" There is the answer, "Some say John the Baptist [who had been killed by Herod in the interval]; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (vv. 13-14). In chapter 17, after the disciples had seen the Lord glorified in the transfiguration, they asked Jesus, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" (Matt. 17:10).

The Jews had a reason for their expectation, of course, for in Malachi 4:5-6, in the very last verses of the Old Testament, there was the promise: "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse." This was the basis of their belief. John the Baptist was not an entirely unlikely candidate for the fulfillment of this prophecy. He was rugged like Elijah. He resembled Elijah in his work (cf. Matt. 17:12). Nevertheless, John was not Elijah, and he refused this designation.

Finally, the interrogators asked him whether he was "that prophet." This was a reference to the prophet predicted by Moses in Deuteronomy 18: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him" (Deut. 18:15; cf. v. 18). But John denied that he was "that prophet" also.

Who then is John? John says that he is "a voice" who has come to prepare the way of the Lord, as Isaiah had prophesied. "A voice of one calling: In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isa. 40:3-5).

You cannot see a voice. You can only hear it. No one looks much at the workman who is only preparing the road for the coming of the king. Yet, this was what John the Baptist declared himself to be: a voice and a workman. The last thing in the world that he wanted was for men to

look at him. He said elsewhere, "He [Jesus] must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30). John wanted men to forget him and see only the King.

In the Service of the King

This should be true of every good preacher, Christian worker, and witness. If we are to witness for Jesus Christ, we must first of all forget ourselves—our likes, our dislikes, our needs, our personal interests, our free time, even at times our work or our ambitions. We must think first of the other person and of his need for the Savior.

What is it that will make a person forget himself in order to point to Jesus? Only an awareness of Jesus' worth and his glory! I read a story some time ago of an African convert who told many people about Jesus, despite his great suffering from elephantiasis. This is a terribly painful disease, causing enlargement and thickening of body tissues, specifically the enormous enlargement of a limb. The disease had affected this man's legs so that it was extremely difficult for him to walk. Yet he thought nothing of making his way around the village to introduce others to the One who had transformed his life.

After a period of several months, during which he had visited all the huts in his village, this man began to take the gospel to another village that lay two miles away through the jungle. Every morning he started out painfully on his monstrous legs, and every night he returned, having visited as many homes in the second village as he possibly could. Then he would remain in his own village for several weeks before he once more became restless.

He asked the missionary doctor if another village he had visited as a child had heard the gospel. The missionary said, no, it had not. The African Christian wanted to take the Good News there, but the missionary advised against it because the village lay more than twelve miles away, over dangerous jungle paths. The burden so grew upon the African Christian that one day he slipped away quietly before dawn. The missionary learned later that the convert, arriving in the new village

some time after noon, his legs bruised and scratched, had begun immediately to tell the people about Jesus. He went to everyone there, and it was not till the sun was sinking low in the sky that he began his lonely and dangerous trip through the jungle toward home. At midnight he arrived, bleeding and almost unconscious, at the house of the missionary doctor, who tended to him and dressed his feet.

Here was a man, sent by God to point people to Jesus, who was effective because he had forgotten himself in the service of his King.

Chapter 17.
Witnessing to Jesus Christ

John 1:29-34

How can a believer witness to Jesus Christ? It is an important question, not only because each of us is called upon to witness (as we have already seen) but also because the expansion of the gospel in our time (as in all ages of the Christian church) depends in no small measure upon whether or not we will do it and, if we do, how well. We have already looked at the first great principle for being a witness: the witness must recognize that he has no independent importance in himself. The evangelist expresses this in the case of John the Baptist, whose witness has been the basis of our story, by reminding us that he was not the Light. This teaches us, among other things, that a Christian will never be an effective witness if he is placing either himself or his own needs first in his thinking. Our own needs possess a certain degree of importance, of course. But we will never be able to focus on the needs of others if our own needs dominate us. For one thing, there is a sense in which our own needs are already met, whether we recognize it or not, for Paul wrote to the Philippians, saying, "And my God *will meet* all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). Our needs are met in Christ, and we have little to testify of if we do not see that clearly. Besides, we cannot really show love to the

other person, which is the essence of witnessing, if we are not placing his needs before our own.

All that is true. Yet, we must go on from this point to see that our recognizing that we are not the Light is not in itself witnessing. That is only the first and preliminary principle.

A Verbal Witness

The second great principle for witnessing is that we must bear witness to the Light, and this means that we must witness verbally. Our witness must move out of the area of life and into the area of words. If it does not, we will be like the young man who went from a Christian home to a secular college. His parents were concerned how he would make out. So when he arrived home at Christmas they asked him anxiously, "How did you get along?" He answered, "Oh, I got along great. No one even knows that I'm a Christian." I am not denying the importance of the Christian life, of course. There must be the kind of upright character and true commitment to Christ that will back up the witness by words. We will see more about this in our next study. But, important as it is, the living of the Christian life by itself is not enough for a *complete* witness; there must also be a verbal witness.

We can easily see why this must be so. For one thing, a nonverbal witness is at best merely puzzling to the non-Christian, and it can be totally misunderstood. Some time ago, after I had mentioned witnessing in the context of a message I was giving in a church other than my own, a woman came up to me to tell how she was bearing a witness in her place of employment. She apparently worked in a large office. Just that morning, so she said, as she was going out to lunch, one of the other workers handed her fifty cents and asked her to pick up a packet of cigarettes for him. What did she do? She returned the money, saying that she did not believe in smoking. She said to me that she believed God had helped her to bear a witness for Christ in that situation.

I do not want to be too hard on this woman. She had a right, if she wished, to disapprove of smoking. In view of the warnings being given

in our day about smoking, probably more nonChristians than ever before are taking this position. Still, the point that I want to make here is that in this case the "witness" to Christ that the woman thought she was giving was really no witness at all. For had I been the man who had asked the favor and been refused, I would probably have considered her rude and never even have thought of her views in terms of Christianity.

The second reason why a nonverbal witness is inadequate is that, if it is effective at all, it should lead to a verbal witness. That is, if you are attempt-ll ing to honor Christ by the way you are living, the things you are doing should lead to conversation about Jesus Christ and what he has meant in your experience.

Someone will say, "Oh, but isn't it true that many persons have been led to Jesus Christ by means of the conduct of some Christian?" That is quite true; many have! The conduct of Christians has been an important step, even an essential step, in the salvation of many thousands of persons. But I am convinced that the matter has never stopped on that level and that these thousands would never have come to Christ unless the witness through the lives of Christians had not moved beyond actions at some point to a consideration of the person and claims of Jesus Christ as these truths were presented to them verbally.

People who have greatly moved the world for Christ have been ready to speak at any opportunity. In his book *Henceforth,* Hugh E. Hopkins tells of Douglas Thornton, an English believer who was being seen off at a railway station in Egypt. With some difficulty his friend found him an empty compartment on the train: "An empty compartment!" Thornton exclaimed. "Why, man, I want to fish." He moved into a crowded compartment. It is also recorded that, when exploring the Great Pyramid on the outskirts of Cairo, Thornton redeemed the time by evangelizing the guide who was then crawling up a narrow passage on his hands and knees behind him.

We find another example in the conversion experience of John Wesley, the father of the

Methodist church. Wesley had been a preacher for years before he was genuinely born again, and during this time (as might be expected) his ministry was a failure. After a particularly discouraging experience in the United States, as he was returning from Georgia to England by ship, he came into contact with a body of Moravian Christians. He was very much impressed with the calm they maintained in the midst of a storm at sea. It was not on the ship, however, but later at a meeting in the little chapel at Aldersgate in London, while someone was reading from Luther's exposition of the letter to the Galatians, that Wesley "felt his heart strangely warmed" and was converted. After that he became one of the greatest evangelists in church history.

A verbal witness is a true witness. Thus, throughout the Gospel of John, the stories of those who are reached by Jesus Christ almost without exception end with a spoken profession of their belief. The man born blind is last seen in an attitude of worship, voicing the confession: "Lord, I believe" (John 9:38). The woman of Samaria grows in her understanding of Jesus. At the beginning of the narrative she regards him merely as a Jew (John 4:9). In verse 12 she raises the possibility that he may be greater than the patriarch Jacob. In verse 19 she calls him a prophet. The conclusion comes in her testimony to her neighbors when she argues that he is the Messiah (v. 29). In the same way John the Baptist testifies to the One who takes away the sin of the world.

The Message

Now, if we are to bear a witness to Jesus Christ, clearly we must know something about him. And this means that we must have a message. What is our message? The major parts of the answer to this question are suggested in our story. They are: 1) a witness to *who Jesus Christ is;* 2) a witness to *what he has done;* and 3) a witness to *how a man or woman can come to know him personally.*

First, we witness to who Jesus Christ is. John did this when he testified, "This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me'" (v. 30). Again, "I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God" (v. 34). This is where we begin

in our witness, because most of the points of Christian doctrine gain their significance from the fact that Jesus Christ is God. If Christ were only a man, then his death on the cross might have been inspiring as an example or a means by which we are excited to good works. We might say, "I never want such a tragedy to happen again" and become a great social worker. But if this is all that Christ is, then his death was in no sense an atonement; he did not die for our sin, and we are still under the condemnation of God and are still the children of wrath. In the same way, if he is not God, then we have no living God to worship, for we cannot know God apart from Jesus Christ.

As you begin to witness, let me suggest that you begin here. Begin with Christ's claims about himself. You might refer to John 5:18, which tells us that Jesus "was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." He said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). He told the disciples: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Most nonChristians have never actually faced these claims, and many have never even heard them.

Second, we witness to what Jesus Christ has done. In one sense, of course, this is an overwhelming topic. For if Jesus is God, then all that God has done, and does, Christ does. He has been active in the creation of the world, in guiding the history of redemption, in giving us the Old and New Testaments, in helping us today in temptation, and in other things. Yet there is a sense in which the work of Christ focuses on something much more limited and therefore much easier to share. The focus of Christ's work is to be found in his death on the cross. Hence, we want to share the meaning of his death when we try to tell others about him.

In his day, John the Baptist did this by reference to the Jewish sacrifices. He said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (v. 29). Have you ever given thought to what must have been involved in that statement—for John and for his hearers? For centuries Israel had known all about the sacrificial lamb. They had learned about it first from the story of Abraham, who was the father of their nation. At God's command Abraham had been going up the mountain to sacrifice

his son Isaac when Isaac had turned to him and asked, "Father, ...Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb?" Abraham had answered, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." And God did! Israel had also known about the lamb as a result of the institution of the Passover. On that occasion the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of the house was the sign for the angel of death to pass by. Moreover, they knew that daily in the services of the temple lambs and goats were sacrificed. They knew that in every instance the sacrifices meant the death of an innocent substitute in place of the one who had sinned.

On this basis John the Baptist came along and exclaimed, "Look, the Lamb of God." He recognized that the sacrifices were to be fulfilled in Jesus and that he would bear our sin as Isaiah had said. "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:4-5).

I like to think, as many other commentators have suggested, that as John identified Jesus as the sin-bearing Lamb, there may have been passing by the flocks of lambs that were driven up to the walls of Jerusalem each year to serve as sacrificial lambs for the Passover. The Passover feast was not far off (John 2:12-13). Perhaps John was led to refer to Jesus in this fashion because it showed vividly that he was able to deliver from death those who believed on him.

Do you believe that? Jesus is able to deliver us from death today. There is that final death, the second death, which is the separation of the soul of the individual from God. He delivers from that. But there are also the little deaths that we experience daily because of our natural alienation from God. Jesus is the answer to those deaths also. If you are a Christian, it is your privilege to tell others of the means by which sin is removed—through faith in the person and death of Jesus Christ—and that the one who believes in him is given new life, peace, joy, and freedom of access to God.

Finally, we also witness to the way in which a person can come to know and trust Jesus for himself. John did it by pointing to the fact that Jesus is the giver of the Spirit. He said, "I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit'" (v. 33). What does that mean? It means that Jesus Christ was the One who would give of his Spirit to those who should follow him. Or, to put it another way, it means that Jesus would come to live within the lives of his followers. Thus, when we bear witness to Jesus today, we talk not only of who Jesus is and of what he has done but also of how a person can come to have him enter his life and fill it.

Opening the Door

Someone will ask, "You say that Christ must enter our lives, but you have not told us how that can happen. How does that happen?" The answer is that it happens by faith as we "receive" him or "open" the doors of our lives to his knocking. One statement of that principle occurs in this same chapter in the verse that says: "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (v. 12). Another verse is Revelation 3:20: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." According to these verses there are two steps to the process. There is the step in which we first "hear" his voice or "believe" in him. Then there is the step in which we "receive him" or "open" to his call.

We do this by praying. We say, "Lord Jesus Christ, I admit that I am a sinner and in need of the salvation that you bring to men. I believe that you died for me, so that my sin is atoned for and borne away forever. I now open the door and invite you into my life and ask that you will cleanse me and rule my life forever. Amen." It is as simple as that, but it must be a definite commitment. The act itself is indispensable.

Have you done that? If you have not, you are not a real Christian. It is not enough merely to know about Christ; you must belong to him. On the other hand, if you have done that, then let me ask whether you have

ever invited another person to make the same commitment. I can tell you on the basis of my own experience—and that of many others—that there are few joys equal to that which is ours when the invitation is given to believe in Jesus and the person to whom we are witnessing responds and comes to him.

Chapter 18.
Family Evangelism

John 1:35-51

Not long ago I heard of a group of people who disseminate their beliefs in a very unfortunate and, in my opinion, unbiblical way. Having memorized a presentation of their doctrine, they buttonhole a person, unload their presentation, and then dart away as if to say, "Well, that's finished; now it's up to the person either to believe it or go to hell." If you have ever found yourself doing that or even something close to that as you present the gospel of Jesus Christ, then these verses deserve your special consideration.

In the last few chapters we have learned two very important principles for witnessing. Both have been illustrated by the witness of John the Baptist to Jesus during the earliest days of Christ's ministry. The first, quite simply, is that John did not bear witness to himself. He confessed that he was not the Light. The second principle is that he did bear witness to the Light. The Light was Jesus, and John bore witness to him verbally. These two points lead now to a third great principle, which is, if we understand it properly, the direct antithesis to the distorted idea of witnessing that I have described above. John bore witness to Jesus; but he did so not to unload a certain amount of information but to lead others to believe in Jesus personally. This means that he had their life and destiny in view when he was witnessing.

We see this in two ways in John's Gospel. It is presented doctrinally, and it is illustrated clearly in the narrative. The doctrinal statement is

found in the verses we have already referred to several times previously (verses 6-8), although it is somewhat hidden in the English translation. In English we read that John "came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe" (v. 7). In Greek the flow of thought is emphasized by a succession of relative clauses that build the thought in a characteristic Greek construction. The Greek says that John came for a witness *in order that* (as a specific and immediate object) he might identify the Light and *in order that* (as a final and ultimate object) all men might believe. These were the two objects of his witnessing.

Moreover, no sooner is the witness of John given in the narrative section of the Gospel (vv. 1934) than we find this doctrinal statement illustrated by the account of the conversion of those who actually did believe as the result of John's witness. In brief, they are Andrew and an unnamed disciple (whom I believe to be the apostle John), and then, through their witness and the witness of Philip, also Peter and Nathanael. The story of these conversions occupies the next three days of the first week of Christ's ministry and fills out the next seventeen verses.

A Brother

The lesson of the verses at this point is that the witness-giving of John was immediately picked up by those who believed as the result of his testimony, so that Andrew and Philip, and eventually John the evangelist, Peter, and Nathanael, became the next witnesses. What is more, they followed the same pattern of witnessing that John the Baptist had followed. That is, (1) they did not attract attention to themselves, (2) they bore a verbal witness to Jesus, and (3) they did so in order that those to whom they were speaking might believe in him also.

This is the story. As John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples near the place where they had been baptizing, Jesus walked by. Presumably Jesus had returned only the day before from his forty days in the wilderness and his temptation by Satan (recounted in Matt. 4:1-

11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13) John said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" (v. 36). The two disciples heard John speak and followed Jesus.

Jesus turned when he saw them following and said to them, "What do you want?"

They answered, "Rabbi [which John tells us means 'Teacher'], where are you staying?"

Jesus said, "Come, and you will see." So they went with him and remained with him the rest of that day, for by the time they had arrived at the place where Jesus was staying, it was already four o'clock in the afternoon.

We do not have a record of what was said that evening, but whatever it was it must have been tremendously exciting for these two original disciples, for when morning came one of the two who had followed Jesus (Andrew) immediately set out to find Simon Peter, his brother. We are told that when he had found Peter he said to him simply, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ), and he brought Peter to Jesus (v. 41).

We should stop at this point, I believe, to think of the significance of this first example (John the Baptist's being excluded) of a normal human witness. It was the witness of Andrew to his brother. And it was therefore a witness that began, as all true witnessing should begin, at home.

Donald Grey Barnhouse has written of this passage: "Even before the Lord Jesus told His disciples that He would make them fishers of men, Andrew witnessed to his brother and landed the big fisherman, Simon Peter. Many who think that they can be used in far fields have never begun where the Lord Jesus meant them to begin—right at home."

This is doubly important, first because it introduces us to a whole sphere and order of evangelism that is often overlooked in missionary conferences and missionary appeals, and second because it is through the home that the great majority of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ come to faith in him.

Barnhouse, in *First Things First,* has also written, "Oh, it is true that the first generation of believers in any tribe come straight out of heathenism, generally by the witness of some foreigner who has brought the witness to that particular tribe. And so it is that most of church history is the story of some alien who entered a tribe with little knowledge of the language, and who preached Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit so that people were saved. Paul, the Greek Jew, took the gospel to the tribes of Asia Minor, to Macedonia, and to Greece. Irenaeus, a Greek, was the first to take the gospel to Gaul, which is now France. A Latin from Rome, the second St. Augustine, was the first missionary to England, while an Englishman, Boniface, was the first to carry the gospel to Germany. Young Patrick, of high family, was kidnapped by marauders and carried to Ireland at the age of sixteen, later to become the instrument of the conversion of Ireland. In modern times the list of similar instances crosses the world. Henry Martyn took the gospel to Hindustan and to Persia. We have Adoniram Judson of Burma; Hudson Taylor of China; Mary Slessor of Calabar; Livingstone of Central Africa; and the list goes on until we have Betty Elliot of the Aucas, as well as Wycliffe Bible Translators in many other tribes.

"But in spite of all this list, which grows longer every year, these pioneers win but a small proportion of those who come to Christ. The informant who teaches his language to that strange creature, the missionary, usually ends up by coming to know the missionary's Savior. He has seen Christ in the missionary first of all, and then the informant goes and finds his own brother! That is a *first* in countless tribes. The God of Abraham became the God of Sarah, Abraham's wife, and then the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Household salvation is a very precious truth, and while there are definite promises which give positive assurance only of the salvation of our children, other statements give us large hope that the gospel will penetrate throughout our households."

Charles Spurgeon once observed that although grace does not run in the blood, and regeneration is not of blood or of birth, yet it often happens that God uses one of a household to draw the rest to himself. He calls an individual, and then uses him as a sort of spiritual decoy to bring the

rest of the family into the gospel net. Has God used you in that way? Have you a brother or a sister still outside of Christ? Do you have a husband who does not know him? A wife? I do not see how you can ever consider yourself a true witness to the Lord Jesus Christ if you are not making a maximum effort to lead to him these whom you know best.

But perhaps you are saying, "I have no brother. I have no sister. In fact, I am quite alone in this world." If that is the case, then you must go on to see that the story of the opening week of Christ's ministry also includes the witness of Philip, who had no brother, but who brought his friend to Jesus. We are told that on the next day when Jesus was about to depart for Galilee, he called Philip, saying, Follow me." And Philip, who did follow, then went to his friend Nathanael with the report: "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

At first Nathanael was skeptical. He asked, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"

Philip replied, "Come and see."

When Nathanael came and had his meeting with Jesus, he then concluded for himself: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel" (vv. 43-49).

If you have no brother or sister (or any other family), then you must begin, as Philip did, with your friend or your neighbor. He is the one whom God has placed in your path; it is a witness to him that God has most entrusted to your charge.

"Come and See"

It is clear that if we are to witness successfully in the circles where we are best known, then we must meet certain conditions. What are they? In the first place, there must be a change in our manner of life, and this

must be seen in our willingness to take second place in order that the ones to whom we are witnessing might see Jesus.

If you are sitting in a waiting room somewhere with a packet of tracts in your pocket and a person sits down next to you whom you do not know, you can witness to him and it will hardly cost you anything. That is not difficult. But if you are going to witness effectively to your brother, there must be a change in your life.

Unlike the man on the seat next to you, your brother knows you. He knows whether the thing you are professing has affected you personally. He knows whether you take your turn drying the dishes at home or whether you try to wiggle out of the responsibility. He knows whether you put thought into caring for other members of the family. He knows whether or not you are touchy and anxious above all to defend your own interests. In short, he knows whether the faith you profess is real or ineffectual. He knows whether Christ occupies the highest point in your life or whether you do.

Andrew was one who placed himself second in order that he might bring others to Jesus. We do not know a great deal about Andrew because he was not terribly well known. In fact, he was so little known that he is often introduced to us in the New Testament as Simon Peter's brother. Everyone knew who Peter was; Andrew was the man who was related to Peter. There are only three stories in the Gospels in which Andrew plays a significant role. There is the story recorded here. There is the time in which he brought to Jesus the lad with the five loaves and two small fishes (John 6:8-9). And there is the incident in which the Greeks were brought to Jesus (John 12:22). In each case Andrew put himself second in order that he might introduce others to the Savior.

The second condition for an effective witness to those who know us best is that we must be willing to let Jesus win them through us and not depend on our clever techniques or our arguments. There is no record of Andrew arguing with Peter or of Philip arguing with Nathanael.
They merely invited the one to whom they were witnessing to "Come and see."

Where did they learn this technique, if we may call it that? They learned it from Jesus. When Jesus turned around and saw them following him, he first asked the question, "What do you want?" We can always begin with that question, for the gospel always relates to the needs and longings of men. When they then expressed an interest in knowing more about him, he replied with the invitation: "Come and see." It was this approach that Andrew and Philip then emulated, and Philip actually used the identical words in his approach to Nathanael (v. 46).

William Barclay tells us in his commentary on this passage how the great nineteenth-century agnostic Aldous Huxley was once profoundly moved by the gospel. He had been at a weekend house party in the midst of which, on Sunday morning, most of the guests proposed to go to church. Huxley did not intend to go and instead approached a rather plain man who, nevertheless, was known to have a very simple and radiant faith. He said to the man, "Suppose you don't go to church today and instead stay home and tell me quite simply what your Christian faith means to you and why you are a Christian."

The man replied, "Oh, I can't do that. You could demolish my arguments in a minute; I'm not clever enough to argue with you."

"I don't want to argue with you," Huxley replied. "I just want you to tell me simply what this Christ means to you." The man then stayed home and told Huxley of his faith. When he had finished, there were tears in the eyes of the brilliant agnostic. He said, "I would give my right hand if only I could believe that." What touched his heart? It was not arguments. It was a genuine faith expressed by one who knew Jesus and was not ashamed to invite others to come to him.

Time with Jesus

There is just one more point that comes out of this story, although it is clearly related to everything that has been said previously. We return to the story and find that before Andrew and the other disciple became witnesses, they had first spent time with Jesus. John tells us that they arrived about the tenth hour at the place where Jesus was staying—that

is, about four o'clock in the afternoon—and that they spent the night there. What do you suppose they talked about until nightfall? We are not told, but the story reminds us of that other story in Luke where Christ spoke to the Emmaus disciples, showing them from the Old Testament how it was necessary for him "to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" after which they confessed, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:26, 32). After such time spent with Jesus, when the heart burns, one is constrained to go out and find his brother.

This is the secret of all effectual witnessing. If we spend time with Christ, the other matters— knowing that we are not the Light, pointing to the Light, desiring men and women to believe— will come naturally. Moreover, we will find ourselves going to the other one to say simply, "I have found Christ. He has changed me. Come with me to Jesus."

Chapter 19.
Credibility: Bridging the Gap

John 1:35-51

We live in an era in which credibility, or the lack of it, has become a significant issue. We talk about the credibility gap. It exists between parents and children, between those who are in authority and those under them, between races, between governments, between the electorate and those who seek public office. Credibility is also an issue when you and I attempt to bear a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ.

The law of the Jewish people always demanded two witnesses to any fact submitted in a legal proceeding. This is quite generally known, primarily because of the well-known phrase "at the mouth of two or three witnesses" that occurs often in the Old Testament. It is not so generally known that Jewish law, like contemporary law, also demanded that all the witnesses be credible. That is to say, it demanded that the witnesses be in a position in which they had knowledge of the facts

involved, that they be morally above reproach, and that they possess a reputation for accuracy.

These factors were utilized on one occasion by the Lord Jesus Christ when he was called on to be a judge by those who actually desired to accuse him. They brought a woman to him who had been taken in adultery and who was quite possibly known to them because of their own participation in her sins. They asked him if he would uphold the law of Moses, which commanded that a person guilty of adultery be stoned, or if he would ignore the law and allow her to go free. Whichever way he answered they had him trapped, they thought. Instead of answering them immediately, however, the Lord Jesus stooped and wrote on the ground. Then he told the woman's accusers that the one who was without sin among them should cast the first stone at her. When they had been discredited as witnesses in their own eyes by their own consciences and had slipped away one by one, he turned to the woman and asked where her accusers were. She answered by saying that there was no one there to accuse her, and Jesus was able to dismiss the case under even the most demanding strictures of the law and deal with her in grace by means of his own righteousness.

Thus far in our study of witnessing we have dealt with only the first of these legal requirements. That is, we have shown that there must be witnesses so that what is established by one witness might be confirmed by God himself as he adds to that witness by his twos and threes and twelves and seventies. However, there is still the question of the witness's character, and this is also important. Luke recognized this indirectly in the opening verses both of his Gospel and the Book of Acts when he stressed that the facts concerning the life of Jesus Christ had been established by credible eyewitnesses chosen by God to bear testimony.

What about the credibility of the witnesses? What about your credibility and mine? What must you be and what must you know if your witness to the Lord Jesus Christ is to be validated?

I believe that at least eight things must be true of you if your witness to unbelievers is to be credible. (1) You must know that God's saving work has been done in your life and that it has been done forever. (2) You must know that you are a sinner and that in yourself you do not want to do God's will. (3) You must be surrendered to God. (4) You must spend time with Jesus. (5) You must be grounded in the great truths of Scripture. (6) You must be planted if you are to bear fruit. (7) You must be willing to do hard work. (8) Everything you do must be characterized by love. We now need to look at each of these requirements individually.

Assurance

The first principle is that you must know that God's saving work has been done in your life and that it has been done forever. It is easy to see why this is so. If you are uncertain about your salvation, or if you are afraid you might lose it, then all your efforts must be expended in solving these problems for yourself, and you won't be worth anything as a witness to others.

Take Martin Luther as an example. If there was ever a man who was concerned about the state of his soul, it was Martin Luther. It was this that drove him to the Erfurt Convent of the Augustinian Eremites and allowed him to submit himself to all sorts of rigors for the sake of his soul's salvation. He starved himself, beat himself, gave himself to a deep and systematic study of the Scriptures. These endeavors caused the other, less disciplined monks to regard him somewhat as a miracle of piety. His reputation for being a "young saint" spread throughout the other monasteries of Germany, even as far distant as the monastery at Grimma. Yet, at this stage of his life, in spite of his efforts and discipline, Luther was uncertain about the state of his own soul and consequently was of no use to anyone. It was only after Luther had come to the knowledge of the gospel of grace and was assured of his own salvation that he became a witness to others. Then God was able to take him out of the monastery at Erfurt and use him to shake a continent.

It is the same with you. If you are uncertain about your own relationship to God, you will never be worth anything as a witness. You may be saved. I do not mean that you cannot be a Christian and be uncertain of your salvation at the same time. That is true of far too many believers, though it should not be. But the point I am making is that if you are uncertain about your salvation, you will not be able to witness about the Lord Jesus Christ to others.

Let me pause at this point in order to ask whether the gospel itself has become real for you. We have read about Jesus Christ being the Light. Well, is he the Light for you? We have read about him being the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Has he taken away your sin? Is he your Teacher, your Lord, your Savior? If he is, then you must stand firmly upon the Word of God, which declares: "We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. ...And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:9, 11-13). If these things are true for you and if you are assured of them, then you have taken the first important step toward becoming a believable witness.

Still a Sinner

The second step is to realize that you are still a sinner, even after your conversion, and that in yourself you do not want God's will. Naturally, that also includes witnessing about him to others. Do you want God's will? Do you want to witness? If you know your own heart, you will know that basically you prefer to be left alone to your own ways and reasoning.

We are like the Israelites during their march to the Promised Land. They rebelled against God's ways at almost every conceivable stage of their journey. God had taken them from Egypt when they were nothing but slaves, and he had brought them out of the country with signs and great miracles. Yet no sooner were they in the desert than they rebelled against Moses, saying, "If only we had died by the LORD'S hand in

Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death" (Exod. 16:3). When God provided the manna to eat and water to drink, they rebelled against the menu. They said, "We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" (Num. 11:5-6). Later, when they were instructed to enter and possess the land they protested that it was impossible because of the giants that lived there. Then, when God commanded them to remain in the desert, they tried to go into the land and were defeated.

In everything the Israelites rebelled against God's counsel. But God kept at them so they would eventually learn that nothing matters but the purposes of God and so they would determine to do his will even though they did not naturally want to do it. So it is with us. We are not paragons of faith or faithfulness. Left to ourselves we too would go back to Egypt. But we must learn that. And we must determine for this reason to pursue God's will in spite of our natural inclinations.

Surrendered to God

The third thing that must be true of you if your witness is to be believable is that you must be surrendered to God. Someone will say, "But isn't that a contradiction? You have just said that we must know that we do not want God's will and now you say that we must be surrendered to him. Doesn't that mean that we must want it?" Yes, in one sense! There are doctrines in the Christian life that appear as contradictions. Nevertheless, if we are to be effective witnesses for Christ, we must come to the point where we are willing to say, "Even though I do not naturally want your will, nevertheless I have come to the point where I want it even though I do not want it."

To be able to say that, we must recognize that we do not belong to ourselves. We are bought with a price. Therefore, we are to glorify God in our body and in our spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:20).

How we bargain with God at this point! We want to give God anything but ourselves. We will give him our money, even though it sometimes hurts us to do so. We will give him our children—sometimes. I know of some husbands who would even give their wives, and wives who would gladly give their husbands. But we will not give *ourselves!*

We are like Jacob at the brook Jabbok. Jacob had been gone from his homeland for many years because of fear of his brother Esau whom he had cheated out of his birthright. But he had come back with the herds and servants and family with which the Lord had blessed him during the intervening years. He had started out boldly, but the closer he came to Esau's territory, the more frightened he became. He wondered whether Esau would still carry out his threat to kill him. He became even more terrified when he finally reached the brook Jabbok, which was the border of Esau's territory, and a servant who had gone on ahead reported to him that Esau was coming toward him with four hundred men.

What was Jacob to do? He thought about the matter and decided on this strategy. He called a servant and placed 200 ewes in his charge. He said, "Pass over before me. And when you come to Esau and he shall ask, 'Who are you? And to whom do these ewes belong?' then you shall say, 'They belong to your brother Jacob, and they are a present for you.'" Jacob thought that he might win Esau's favor by this plan. After the 200 ewes he sent 20 rams, and he gave the same charge to the servant who was sent with them. After the 20 rams there were 30 camels. Then there were 40 cows, 10 bulls, 20 asses, and 10 foals, each in a group by itself. Then Jacob sent over all the servants and the handmaids. After that he sent over Leah (who was the least popular wife) with her children. Then he sent over Rachel and her children. Then came the brook Jabbok. And there was Jacob, all alone—and trembling (Gen. 32:13-24).

We are like Jacob. We go to church and sing, "I surrender all ... the sheep; I surrender all ... the camels." But we do not give ourselves. That night the angel came and wrestled with Jacob, and brought him to the point of personal submission. Through this experience Jacob became a spiritual man and was used by God to give Israel some of the greatest

revelations in the Old Testament about their future and the coming of the Messiah. At what period of Jacob's life are you? Before Jabbok or after Jabbok? If you are still before Jabbok, when is it that the angel is going to come and wrestle with you?

Time with Jesus

The fourth of the eight requirements for a credible witness is a simple one: you must spend time with Jesus. If you do not, then your witness, no matter how brightly it shone forth at one time, will eventually flicker and go out. We are like oil-burning lamps. If we are to shine, two things are prerequisites: (1) we must first be lit by Jesus Christ, and (2) we must be fed by him.

Probably the best illustration of this principle in the entire Bible is the story we looked at previously. Andrew and John became the first witnesses to Jesus Christ, and Andrew became the very first when he went and found his own brother, Simon Peter. What does John the evangelist say of that event? One of the most significant things he says is that it was about four o'clock in the afternoon when he and Andrew stopped and spent the night with Jesus. Four o'clock! What do you suppose they talked about during the hours between then and the fall of night? We can be certain that they did not talk about the weather. They talked about spiritual things. Jesus taught them about God and man and laid groundwork for the first principles of the gospel. After that they went out to be witnesses.

Do you spend time with Jesus? Nothing can be a substitute for that. We know that this is true even in secular terms, for there is not a judge in the country who will accept "hearsay evidence" in his court. Hearsay evidence is secondhand evidence, the kind that begins, "Well, I was not there, but I heard Mr. Smith say that...." No judge in the country will accept such evidence. And neither will the unbeliever, if you are attempting to provide hearsay evidence in place of your own personal witness to Jesus Christ. However, if you have been spending time with Jesus, then you will be able to say, "He has spoken to me. He has ordered my life. He satisfies my longings. Won't you allow him to do

the same things for you?" If you can do that, then you will *be* a witness as well as be *giving one*, and the one who is not yet a Christian will know that your witness rings true.

We need to stop at this point, and you need to apply some of the principles that I have been stating. Many years ago I read Dale Carnegie's best seller *How to Win Friends and Influence People.* There is much in that book that I have forgotten; but I will never forget that at one point, about halfway through the book, Carnegie broke into his narrative to tell the reader that he had read enough. Instead of going on he was to put the book down and put some of what he had read into practice. When I came to that point I stopped. I never did read the rest of the book. But I did try to do some of the things he suggested. Let us do that also.

What are the first four principles for a credible witness? They are these: (1) you must know that God's saving work has been done in your life and that it has been done forever; (2) you must know that you are a sinner even after your conversion and that in yourself you do not want God's will; (3) you must be surrendered to God; and (4) you must spend time with Jesus. Let us practice these principles. If we do, we will find that God will bless our ministry and that men and women will come to faith in the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 20.

The Mark of the Christian

John 1:35-51

A common reason many non-Christians give for refusing to become Christians is a lack of credibility in the lives of those who profess to be Christ's followers. This lack of credibility may result from a number of factors. Quite a few years ago a certain Bible teacher was in Chicago for the wedding of a young man in business in that city, and after the ceremony he began to talk to him about his becoming a Christian. The

young man replied, "You do not need to waste your time talking to me about that. I work for ... (here he named a prominent Chicago firm). These men are very prominent in the church, but we know how they carry on their business, since we work for them. I have no desire to be a Christian."

I know, of course, that the misinterpretation of Christianity by some Christians is not sufficient excuse for refusing to believe in the gospel. People should be willing to distinguish between authentic and counterfeit currency. But not everyone makes the distinction. And consequently, what a Christian is and does is necessarily a most important part of his witness for the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the last study, the first of two on the credibility of the Christian's witness, we saw what four of the prerequisites for a credible witness were. At this point we want to pick up our study and consider the next four prerequisites.

Knowledge

The fifth requirement, if you are to maintain a credible witness for the Lord Jesus Christ, is that you must be grounded in the great truths of Scripture. I do not mean by this that you must be a theologian or that you must have mastered the content of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. If that were required, few Christians could be witnesses. I mean that you must understand the basic content of the gospel as it is contained in Scripture and that you must be able to articulate it in some fashion to others. Of course, the more you know, the better. This is implied in the very nature of a verbal witness.

What does the word "gospel" mean? It means "good news." And what is the good news? The good news is that God has not left us alone in our sin and loneliness to face the certainty of spiritual death and judgment, but that he has come to us in the person of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die for us and, on the basis of that death, to offer us the gift of eternal life. Moreover, it is the assurance that anyone who will believe these things and receive Christ into his or her life will enter at once into

an eternal relationship with God in which God will become his Father and he will enjoy all the privileges of being one of God's sons or daughters. It is this news with all its ramifications that we are to share with other men and women.

Think, too, of the Great Commission. Did you know that this is the main point of the most popular version of the Great Commission? It says, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20). These verses seem to place the emphasis on *going* into the world to preach the gospel, and many have preached this. Actually, the verb that is translated as the imperative "go" is a participle, not an imperative. So it should be translated "going" or "as you go." The result is that "make disciples" is the only direct command left in the sentence, and the verse should read, "Therefore, going, *make disciples* of all nations." The word "teach" is used in the King James Version and is even repeated twice for emphasis.

Have you tried to fulfill that commandment? Christ was not urging us to go into the world. He expected that we would naturally do that. However, he was urging us to teach, and for that we need a knowledge of the Bible and its doctrinal content. If you do not have that knowledge, I urge you to study the Bible and to put yourself in a position where you can be taught. No one should want to be a "babe" in the Word. We need to go on to maturity.

You Must Be Planted

The sixth requirement for an effective witness is that you must be planted if you are to bear fruit. What must be true of a seed if it is to sprout and be fruitful? Well, first it must be alive. A dead seed will not germinate. Consequently, if you are to bear fruit as a Christian, you must first of all be alive in Christ. But even this is not all that is necessary, for even a living seed will not produce fruit if it is simply left alone on a shelf or in ajar somewhere and is never inserted into the

ground. It must be planted. In the same way, you will never bear fruit as a Christian if you merely sit on a pew. You must be planted somewhere in our society.

Another way of saying the same thing is to say that you must know and be with non-Christians. I am afraid that we often find ourselves in the same condition in witnessing as we do in race relations. Many white Christians mean well toward African Americans in our society. The trouble is that they do not know any African Americans. In the same way, few of us know as many non-Christians as we should if we are to be effective evangelists.

How is the situation to be corrected? It will never be corrected by reading a book, although that may help. It will not be corrected by hearing a sermon. It will be corrected only as you roll up your sleeves, get into the world side by side with those who are not yet Christians, get to know them, share their hopes and frustrations, and speak to them. Only then will you be able to point to Christ as the answer to their particular problems. I have often pointed out that when God placed Israel in the world as a witness, he placed her not in the mountains of Tibet or the undiscovered plains of America but in Palestine, at the crossroads of the ancient world. It was there in the midst of the world (but not of it) that she was to bear witness.

Hard Work

The seventh prerequisite is that you must be willing to do hard work. This may seem quite obvious, but it is necessary to say this because not all Christians are noted for their hard work or diligence. In fact, some Christians are quite lazy.

Shortly before his crucifixion Jesus Christ told a story that pointed up the truth of this fact and that encouraged his followers to be diligent. He said that a certain man who was about to take a journey first called his servants and entrusted his wealth to their care. To one servant he gave five talents. The amount was equal to about $5,000, but we must remember that in terms of purchasing power the amount was probably

closer to $500,000 as we measure wealth today. To a second servant he gave two talents; to a third, just one. After a time the man came back and demanded a reckoning. The servant to whom he had given five talents had invested it and presented his master with five more talents. The second servant had done the same, producing two more talents. To each of them the master said, "Well done, good and faithful servant. ...Come and share your master's happiness!"

At last the servant who had been given one talent came forward. His account was a sad one. "'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest'" (Matt. 25:24-27). In this reproof the unprofitable servant was condemned for two failings. First, he was condemned for his wickedness, because he unjustly called his lord a hard man. And, second, he was condemned for his sloth or *laziness.* Quite clearly he was even blaming his lord for his own lack of diligence.

Do we do that? I am afraid we do sometimes. The Lord places a great opportunity before us, and instead of considering it an opportunity, we think it a burden. In fact, some Christians seem to consider every opportunity a burden. Watchman Nee, a Chinese Christian who, until his imprisonment in China, was himself a very diligent worker, has written in *The Normal Christian Worker, "*A person who regards everything as a burden cannot be a faithful servant of the Lord; he cannot even be a faithful servant of men. ... Our characters need to be disciplined till we cease to find work irksome and can delight in spending time and strength and material resources without stint in order to serve others."

Characterized by Love

The final point is that, if we are to win others for Jesus Christ, everything we do must be characterized by love. When E. Stanley Jones was in India on one of his many journeys he met with Mahatma Gandhi. In the course of the visit Jones asked this question: "Mr. Gandhi, what must the Christians do to win India for the Lord Jesus Christ?" Gandhi replied, "There are four things that the Christians must do. First, let Christians live like Jesus Christ. Second, do not compromise your faith. Third, learn all you can about the non-Christian religions. And fourth, let everything you do be characterized by love." I believe that the Indian leader had great insight into the nature of Christianity and that his last point in particular exposed its true priorities.

Is everything you do and I do characterized by love? To have it be so is not optional. It is actually to be what Francis A. Schaeffer in *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century,* calls "the mark of the Christian," a label to distinguish a Christian "not just in one era or in one locality but at all times and all places until Jesus returns." According to the Bible, others are even to judge the credibility of our life and our witness to Jesus Christ by its presence.

Does this seem extreme to you? It is not, for it is based on the explicit teaching of the Lord Jesus
Christ himself. During one of his farewell discourses to his disciples just before his crucifixion, Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34, 35). How are the unsaved to know that we are Christ's disciples? By our love! If we love each other! On another occasion Jesus taught that this same love was also to be extended to those we are seeking to win; for he taught that the second most important commandment—after loving God with all our being—is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Do we love like this? Is this our mark? The following two stories measure whether or not this essential mark of the Christian is present in our lives. The first story comes from the years I spent in Basel,

Switzerland, doing graduate study. A girl named Sheila, who had come from a bad background in England, had gone to Switzerland when still quite young to make a better life for herself. She was lonely, and having no one to whom to turn, she unfortunately fell in with a young man who did not marry her but who left her with a child. By the time I had met her the child was about four years old, and Sheila herself was on guard with most people and very hostile to the church and Christianity.

In time, through the witness of the English-speaking community, she became a Christian. Some time later my wife and I left to return to America, and she immigrated to Canada. We corresponded with her for about six months after she arrived in Canada, and we had the impression that she was not fitting in with any Christian group in her area. We went to visit her and found that we were right; we began to talk with various Christian people about her. There was interest to a degree, but no real love. We were usually told, "Oh, there is a very good church in our city." And we were given the name. Sometimes it was a Presbyterian church, sometimes Baptist, sometimes independent. But in all our conversations not one person said, "Give me her name and address. I'll stop by and invite her to go with me on Sunday morning."

Finally, being very unhappy, she left that city for another one and (I am afraid) once again fell in with bad company. Eventually, in spite of much effort, we lost touch with her.

The second story is more promising. The Rev. Fernando Vangioni, assistant evangelist with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, told it at the Berlin Congress on Evangelism (1966). He said that he was in South America for a series of meetings. After one meeting a woman came up to him and said, "I wonder if you would take time to speak to a girl whom I am bringing to the meeting tomorrow night. She went to New York some years ago full of hope, thinking that America was the land of opportunity. Instead of doing well she went through terrible times in the city. She was used by one man after another. All treated her badly. Now she has returned to this country very bitter, and hostile to all forms of Christianity." The evangelist said he would speak with her.

On the next night the girl was there, but when Mr. Vangioni and she met, there was not the slightest response to his attempts to speak with her. He said he had never looked into eyes that were so hard-looking or listened to a voice so hostile. At last, seeing that he was making no progress, Mr. Vangioni asked, "Do you mind if I pray for you?"

The girl said, "Pray if you like, but don't preach to me. And don't expect me to listen."

He began to pray, and as he prayed he was greatly moved. Something in the tragedy of her life caused tears to run down his face. At last he stopped. There was nothing to add. He said, "All right, you may go now."

But the girl did not go. Instead, touched by this manifestation of love for her, she replied, "No, I won't go. You can preach to me now. No man has ever cried for me before."

I do not know what your reaction to that is. Perhaps the tears came more easily to a man of Latin temperament. But I wonder if you have ever been touched at all for one who is lost and ignorant of Christ's love. Do you merely say, "Oh, we have a wonderful church; she should go there"? Or do you go out of your way to seek and save the lost, crushed, and lonely? We should be able to say, as Paul did, "If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us. ...We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:13-14, 20).

Chapter 21.
The Baptism of John

John 1:29-34

Several studies ago, before I began to look at the subject of witnessing in John's Gospel, I noted that after we had completed that study we would be going back to some verses skipped earlier and consider the subject of baptism. The verses that refer to baptism are verses 29 to 34. These verses refer to John's baptism, the baptism of Jesus by John, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit or Christian baptism. Consequently, they are a proper base on which to discuss the whole subject of baptism and its significance.

I want to say at the outset, however, that almost nothing that follows will be directed toward the traditional differences within the Christian church regarding baptism. Nothing should be construed as a commentary on infant baptism versus adult baptism. Nothing should be applied to the various modes of administering baptism. Instead, it will be directed primarily at understanding the meaning of the identification of believers with Christ, which is what water baptism signifies.

A Difficult Subject

This is an enormous and complicated subject. The truth of this statement can be seen quite easily merely by reflecting on the number of books that have been written about baptism in recent years and on the fact that they do not agree. One of the most influential works on baptism is by Karl Barth, entitled, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism.* It restates many of the Reformed doctrines about baptism but opposes infant baptism. Shortly after Barth's book appeared, Oscar Cullmann, Barth's colleague at the University of Basel, Switzerland, also wrote a book on baptism, but he disagreed with Barth. His work is called *Baptism in the New Testament.* Joachim Jeremias, a great biblical scholar, wrote a masterful volume entitled *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries*. He was contradicted by Kurt Aland (*Did the Early Church Baptize Infants?*). Now we have Jeremias's reply to Aland's contradiction. There are also many other substantial works, such as that by G. R. Beasley-Murray, called, like Cullmann's work, *Baptism in the New Testament.*

Bapto and *Baptizo*

The difficulty of dealing with the subject is compounded further by the fact that there are two very closely related words for "baptism" in the New Testament, instead of one. Although it is a difficulty, recognition of this fact is actually the first step toward solving the difficulty. The first word is *bapto*, which means "to dip" or "to immerse." The second word is *baptizo*, which has quite obviously been transliterated into English to give us our word "baptize."

Whenever a word is transliterated into English, this in itself is quite often an indication of a multiplicity of meanings. If the word *baptizo* had lent itself to an easy translation, an obvious English word would have been used to translate it. Thus, if *baptizo* had meant only "to immerse" (which is what *bapto* means), then "immerse" would be the word used. We would speak of "John the Immerser." Or we would recite, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, immersing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Actually, this is not the case. Therefore, even the fact of the transliteration is an indication that we must look beyond the purely literal meaning of the word "baptize" to the more important metaphorical meanings.

Here we gain a great deal of help from classical Greek literature, for there is evidence that the
Greek classical writers used the word *baptizo* from about 400 B.C. to the second century after Christ. In their writings, *baptizo* always points to a change of identity by any means. Thus, to give a few quite general examples, it can refer to a change having taken place by immersing an object in a liquid, as in dying cloth; by drinking too much wine and getting drunk; by overexertion; and by other causes.

Of all the texts that might be cited from antiquity the one that makes greatest clarity of the distinct use of the two words is a text from the Greek poet and physician Nicander, who lived about 200 B.C. In it he used both the word *bapto*, which we have already seen means "to dip," and the word "baptize" (*baptizo*). It is a recipe for making a pickle. Nicander says that the vegetable should first be dipped (*bapto*) into

boiling water and then baptized (*baptizo*) in the vinegar solution. Quite clearly, both operations had to do with immersing the vegetable in the solution. But the first was temporary while the other, the operation of baptizing the vegetable, produced a permanent change. We could say that the baptizing had identified the vegetable with the brine.

This meaning of the word is also obvious in several texts from the Greek translation of the Old Testament and from the New Testament. Thus, in Isaiah 21:4, we read literally: "Transgression baptizes me; my soul is overcome with fear." This means that the writer was changed from a state of quiet trust in God to fearfulness as a result of his transgressions. Similarly, Galatians 3:27 says, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ"; that is, the Christians in Galatia had been identified with him.

This interpretation of the words *bapto* and *baptizo* is necessary if we are to penetrate to the deepest understanding of the subject. What is more, it is absolutely essential if we are to make sense of the word in some instances.

Identification

Since a firm grasp of the metaphorical meaning of the word "baptize" is essential to this and the studies that follow, let me take a moment to deal with a few verses in which only the understanding of baptism as identification makes any sense at all of the passage.

The first one is Mark 16:16. This verse says: "Whoever believes and is baptized [*baptizo*, not *bapto*] will be saved." There are persons who have read that verse and then drawn the entirely false and indeed foolish conclusion that unless a person is baptized with water he cannot be saved. According to this view, the unbelieving thief crucified with Christ would have been lost. Once we get away from the idea that the verse is talking about water, however, which it is not, and think in terms of the believer's identification with Christ, then the statement becomes clear; and we recognize that Jesus was calling for an intellectual belief in himself plus personal commitment. "He who believes in me and is identified with me shall be saved." In this form the verse is an exact

theological parallel to John 1:12 ("Yet to all who received him, to those who *believed* in his name, he gave the right to become children of God") and Revelation 3:20 ("Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone *hears* my voice and *opens* the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me"). All three verses teach that there must be a personal identification with Jesus by the one believing.

The metaphorical meaning of the word "baptize" illuminates another passage—1 Corinthians 10:1-2: "For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." This passage is especially significant, since the people of Israel were quite obviously not covered or immersed in either the sea or the cloud. The cloud was not over them; it was behind them, separating them from the pursuing Egyptians. And if any group was immersed in the sea, it was the Egyptians, who were drowned in it. The only idea that gives any meaning here is a change of identity. Before they crossed the Red Sea the people were in rebellion against Moses. After the Red Sea their original attitude of rebellion was changed into an attitude of obedience and rejoicing, and they were identified with Moses for the remainder of their desert wandering.

My final example of a verse in which the metaphorical meaning of the word "baptize" is required is 1 Corinthians 15:29. It is the most striking of all. This verse says: "Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead?" I guarantee that you will never make sense of that verse by taking it literally unless, like one of the major cults, you are foolish enough to conclude that you can provide salvation for your dead relatives by being immersed in water for them. So far as I know, this is the only group in the world that believes this. Not even the Roman Catholic church would affirm it, in spite of the fact that priests do say masses for the dead and that baptisms for the dead could be lucrative.

If we do not interpret this verse as evidence for the practice of water baptism on behalf of the dead, then, in what sense are we to interpret it? Take it in the sense that I have outlined, and in that sense place it into

the context of Paul's argument in this chapter. Paul has been marshaling arguments for the existence of life after death. He has shown that Jesus was raised. He has argued that if there is no resurrection, then the fact of Jesus' resurrection could not have been established. After concluding in verse 20, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep," he deals with the consequences of the resurrection, speaking of the resurrection of all believers and the eventual victory of Christ over death and evil.

At this point Paul turns to a related subject and begins to talk about the foolishness of living a Christian life, with all its hardships and persecutions, if there is no resurrection. If this life is all there is, then we should get the best out of it and forget trying to live by Christ's standards. On the other hand, if there is a resurrection, then we should be willing to die to sin now in order that we might rejoice with Christ hereafter. That is his argument.

Now let us translate the verse in this context and with the idea of the believer's identification with Christ in place of the word "baptize."

"For what is the sense of being identified as dead men, if the dead rise not at all? Why should they be identified as dead? Why should they be crucified with Christ? And why are we standing in jeopardy every hour? Why are we in danger of persecution by the authorities for our way of life? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I am identified with Christ in His death every day. That is, I am baptized every day. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what does it get me, if the dead rise not? If there is no resurrection, then let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall be dead."

When we understand the passage in this way, 1 Corinthians 15:29-33 becomes a great argument for our separation from the world's standards of conduct. It is an encouragement to put first things first because of our identification with the Lord Jesus Christ.

John and Jesus

We may now apply the full meaning of "baptize" to the baptism of Jesus by John and to John's baptism generally. Certainly we have looked at enough texts to establish the metaphorical meaning.

What was the significance of John's baptism? John explained it himself in Matthew 3:11 by saying, "I baptize you with water for repentance." That is, John came to prepare the way for Jesus by calling men to repentance; and those who repented of their sin he baptized, as a sign that they had repented. We might say that he identified the repenters. Thus, Today's English Version translates the verse, "I baptize you with water to show that you have repented." When Jesus came John also baptized Jesus, but in this case naturally the identification was not for repentance. Jesus had nothing of which to repent. In this case, John was identifying Jesus as the Messiah. Consequently, we are not surprised to find that this is exactly what John himself declares in our text from John's Gospel: "I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel" (John 1:31).

Finally we must recognize that when Jesus submitted to John's baptism, he too was undergoing an identification—an identification with mankind. It was not an identification with man's sin, of course; it was a declaration that Jesus was fully man apart from man's sin and that he was not ashamed to be identified with his brethren.

In this, Jesus became the fulfillment of the type of humble and self-effacing character revealed in the Old Testament by Moses. We are told in Hebrews that Moses "when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward" (Heb. 11:24-26). That is what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us in an infinitely greater way. He turned his back upon the glories of heaven in order to be identified with us, in order to become one with us; and he did so in love in order that we might become identified with him.

Chapter 22.
The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

John 1:29-34

In the first chapter of John's Gospel, the same verses that tell us that John the Baptist came baptizing with water also tell us that Jesus Christ came to baptize with the Holy Spirit. Thus, we are led to the questions: What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit? How does one receive this baptism? For whom is the baptism of the Holy Spirit intended? The text itself says, "I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God" (John 1:33-34).

As we begin to study this subject, we will be guided quite naturally by our previous discussion of the meaning of the word "baptize." Thus, we will not be talking about any particular mode of administering water baptism or about infant versus adult baptism. We will be talking solely about the nature of that "identification," or "transformation," that the Holy Spirit brings.

For All Believers

Here, of course, we are helped by a number of other verses that are found in the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 12:13, Romans 6:3, Ephesians 4:5, and others. These verses are not descriptive of any particular phenomenon associated with the giving of the Holy Spirit in the early church. They are verses that teach us about the meaning of our baptism with the Holy Spirit, and we turn to them because in relation to this doctrine as in relation to all other doctrines the Bible student must be guided by explicit teaching and not phenomena. To give an example, if we were to read in the Bible that someone in need of a great deal of money prayed for it and received it, that would not mean that each of us could invariably make the same prayer and receive the same answer. We would have to be guided in our understanding of prayer by what the

Bible says explicitly about it. In the same way, we do not want to be guided in our understanding of the baptism of the Holy Spirit by the fact that some (not all) of the early Christians spoke in tongues as a result of receiving the Spirit, or saw the Spirit descend as small flames of fire. We want to be guided by what the New Testament teaches about the Holy Spirit in general and about his baptism.

One of the most instructive verses about the baptism of the Holy Spirit is 1 Corinthians 12:13. "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free— and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." The context shows us that the body spoken of here is the body of Christ or the true church, and the point of the verse is that all who believe in Christ are baptized by means of the Holy Spirit into his body. Hence, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is for all believers.

As I say this I know there will be some who will question it primarily because of the way in which the phrase "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" is used in our day. It is used to denote an experience generally linked with the gift of speaking in tongues, but this use of the phrase is inaccurate. I am not entering here into a discussion of the gift of tongues. I question much of what passes today for the gift of tongues, but I also believe that God can do anything. If he has chosen to give this gift in a special way today, so be it. I am not questioning that. My point is that the experience of tongues or of any other charismatic gift is not the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

It is also inaccurate to refer to the baptism of the Spirit as a second work of grace, as some have done. I will not question for a moment the need for a second work of grace, so long as the person speaking of it acknowledges the need for a third work of grace, a fourth work of grace, a fifth work of grace, and so on up to infinity. There are many experiences of God's grace in the life of a Christian; the Holy Spirit is the vehicle of them. There is also a need, as the Bible indicates, for a constant filling and refilling with the Spirit. But this filling of the Holy Spirit is not the baptism of the Holy Spirit. That is the point. Therefore, the only accurate usage of the phrase is that which applies it to all true

believers as the means by which they become identified with Christ as members of his mystical body.

Another verse is Romans 6:3: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" This means that all believers are identified with Christ in his death through the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 4:5 says that there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." Correctly understood, this verse is a reference to the Trinity. "One Lord" is God the Father, Jehovah. "One faith" is the faith concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. "One baptism" is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In each case the verses cited speak about an experience common to all who believe on Jesus Christ.

We now see why John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.
To do so was a characteristic of his ministry. "In other words," as John R. W. Stott writes in *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit*, "just as John is called 'the Baptist' or 'the baptizer' because it was characteristic of his ministry to baptize with water, so Jesus is called 'the Baptist' or 'the baptizer,' because it is characteristic of His ministry to baptize with the Holy Spirit." This happens to all who believe. In this the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled a long list of prophecies (cf. Ezek. 36:26, 27; Joel 2:28-32) and ushered in the distinctive blessing for all true believers in this age.

Married to Christ

At this point of our study let me introduce an illustration. The illustration is a good one and will not only summarize much of what we have been saying but will also carry us farther along. What is the illustration that the Bible itself uses to describe our identification with Christ? The answer is: marriage (Eph. 5:22-23). In other words, we are identified with Christ in the moment of our belief by means of the Holy Spirit in exactly the same way in which a bride is identified with her husband in the marriage ceremony.

In the first place, the marriage changes the woman's name. She comes into the church as Mary Jones, let us say. She repeats, "I, Mary, take

thee, John, to be my wedded husband; and I do promise and covenant, before God and these witnesses, to be thy loving and faithful wife; in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health; as long as we both shall live." There comes the point in the service where the minister says, "And now by the authority committed unto me as a minister of the Church of Jesus Christ, I declare that John Smith and Mary Jones Smith are now husband and wife, according to the ordinance of God and the law of the state." And Mary, who came into the church as Miss Jones, leaves the church as Mrs. Smith. Mary has been identified with her husband by means of the marriage ceremony. In the same way, the name of the believer is changed from Miss Sinner to Mrs. Christian as she is identified with the Lord Jesus Christ. You could even say that it is the Holy Spirit himself who performs the ceremony.

It is not only Mary's name that is changed as a result of the ceremony, however. There is also a legal change. If Mary owned property before the marriage ceremony, she could have sold it as late as that morning with no signature but her own upon the document. After the marriage ceremony she can no longer do that. Instead, she will need her husband's signature also. In addition to the legal change there is a psychological change. Mary knows that she is a married woman and no longer single. She expects to make adjustments. There is also a change socially. Many of her friends from her single days will now gradually be replaced with married friends, and other women will regard her differently as well.

In exactly the same way, there are also many changes that take place in the moment when the Holy Spirit baptizes us into Christ or identifies us with him. We are baptized with the Spirit. We are placed within the body of Christ. We are identified with Christ. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit until the day of the redemption of our bodies. All these changes take place simultaneously and can be summarized by the truths that we are "in Christ" and that it is the Holy Spirit who has placed us there.

"In Christ"

When we were baptized with the Holy Spirit we were baptized "into Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:3). What does it mean to be baptized "into Christ" or to be "in Christ"? In all there are over a hundred verses in the New Testament that use the word "in" before one of the names of the Lord Jesus, and when these are arranged in order chronologically they show us that we have been placed in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we are identified with him *in* his birth, *in* his circumcision, *in* his death, *in* his resurrection, and that we are to be found *in* Christ forever.

1. The Bible tells us that we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Donald Grey Barnhouse has written: "Since we have already seen that we enter Christ by the work of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we must see that the very first work performed by the Holy Spirit in our behalf was our eternal election to be members of His body. In His eternal decrees our God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, determined that He should not be solitary forever, and decided that out of the multitude of creatures that would be born as sons of Adam, a vast host should one day become sons of God, and should be made partakers of the divine nature, and should be conformed unto the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. This company, which would become the fullness of Him that filleth all in all, would become sons by the new birth, but members of the body by the baptism of the Holy Spirit." Thus, our first identification with Christ was in our election.

2. We are also identified with the Lord Jesus Christ in his birth. Some will ask, "But how are we identified with Christ in his birth?" The answer is that his birth is a picture of our birth, spiritually speaking. We read in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." So we can say that by means of the Holy Spirit we have been identified with Christ in the very life of God. What happened in the birth of the Lord Jesus? The sinless and divine life

of Christ was placed within the sinful and quite human body of the virgin Mary. For a time it appeared that the divine life had been swallowed up, but the life was there and in time revealed itself through the birth of the infant Jesus. In the same way God has announced to us that we shall experience his very own life coming to reside within our hearts. If we reply, as Mary did, "How will this be ... since I am a virgin?" the answer is that "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:34-35). For those of us who believe, all that is good in us is the result of this planting of the divine nature. We are sons of God solely because of our identification with God's Son.

3. We are identified with Christ in his circumcision, for we read: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ" (Col. 2:9-11). Circumcision signifies a separation from the sins of the flesh. Christ was totally separated from such sins. Therefore, we must learn that it is the desire of the Holy Spirit, who has identified us with Christ, to make us like Christ in this separation.

4. We are also identified with Christ in his death, for Romans 6:3 declares: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" There are two senses in which this is true. First, when Jesus Christ died on the cross I died with him so far as my sin is concerned. God the Father put God the Son to death, and since I was united to him by means of the Holy Spirit from before the foundation of the world, I too was put to death. My sin was punished, and I may now stand boldly in God's presence cleansed forevermore. On the basis of this death I may correctly sing:

My sin—oh, the bliss of this
glorious thought!— My sin, not

in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

Second, there is also a sense in which my identity with Christ in his death refers to my life here and now. In fact, this is the purpose for which the truth is mentioned in Romans 6. The theme is the believer's growth in holiness. The life of sin is in the past. The future is holiness. Consequently, the believer is to count himself dead unto sin but alive unto God through the life of the Lord Jesus (v. 11). We might say that through our identification with Christ in his death, the power of sin over us is broken and we are set free to obey God.

5. Finally, we are also identified with Christ in his resurrection (Rom. 6:5). It is true, of course, that one day even our bodies shall be raised in the likeness of his resurrection, but that is certainly not the present or the primary meaning of our identification with Christ in his resurrection as that doctrine is taught in Scripture. The point is that our identification with Christ in his resurrection gives us the possibility of living out the life of Christ now. Thus we should cry out with Paul, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Phil. 3:10-11). That is a present experience. The power of his resurrection is the power of the true Christian life.

All this—our identification with Christ in his birth, circumcision, death, and resurrection—is now ours because of our identification with Jesus Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In a former generation it was the custom often to carve on tombstones the inscription: "Here lies John Smith, who entered into eternal life on the 6th of June, 1854." Do not ever have an inscription like that put on your tombstone. If you have any inscription, let your inscription be to the effect that you were chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world and that you enjoyed his life within you here as a present possession.

Chapter 23.
Christian Baptism

John 1:29-34

At Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, where I serve as the pastor, two steps are usually followed by those who wish to unite with the congregation. First, a person desiring to become a member must meet with the session and give a testimony regarding his own personal faith in Jesus Christ. At this time his name is added to the rolls. Second, he is welcomed publicly before the rest of the congregation on the following Sunday morning. Both steps are normal, but we always tell a new member that his membership does not depend upon the public recognition. On the contrary, he is a member in good standing from the moment of his appearance before the session. He enjoys from that moment all the rights and privileges possessed by any other member of the congregation.

In some ways this is an illustration of the difference between the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which we discussed in our last study, and water baptism, to which study we now come. Both are normal in the natural course of things. But they are two distinct acts, and the second is never essential to enjoying the benefits of being joined to Christ, which is true Christianity.

Rites and Ceremonies

This is the first principle we need to establish in regard to water baptism: *No rite or ceremony ever enters into the essence of Christianity.* In Paul's day, as also in all other ages of the Christian church, there were some who denied this. These persons thought that the blessings of salvation could be enjoyed only by those who adhered to circumcision, that is, who entered into Christianity by the initiatory rite of Judaism. In opposition to their views Paul taught that salvation came purely by grace and was not secured by any act performed by the individual.

In discussing this subject it was normal for Paul to take Abraham as his example, for Abraham was the clearest example in the Old Testament of a man justified before God entirely apart from any ceremonies or from the keeping of the law. Here is his argument in one of its most concise forms: "We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised" (Rom. 4:9-12).

We learn from this statement, first, that all who believe are saved, whether or not they are circumcised. We learn, second, that God gave Abraham the rite of circumcision, not *before* his justification by faith but *after* it, in order to make clear that the rite was not the means by which Abraham entered into salvation. Therefore, we say again that no rite or ceremony ever enters into the essence of Christianity.

It does not follow from this, however, that all rites and ceremonies are therefore to be cast aside or disregarded by Christ's followers, as some groups have done, who have no sacraments at all. *Some rites or ceremonies have value.* This is the second principle.

According to Paul, this was even true in regard to circumcision. "What value is there in circumcision?" he asks in Romans 3:1. He answered, "Much in every way." Thus, in Romans 4:9-12, the passage we have just read, he points out that circumcision had value to Abraham in being a sign and a seal of God's prior act of justification.

Benjamin B. Warfield, who was one of the greatest Reformed theologians America has produced, writes in his discussion of this subject, "According to this passage circumcision had no function whatever in the procuring or reception of salvation, whether as a means

of securing it, or as a condition of its gift, or as a channel of its bestowment. It did not precede salvation as, in one way or another, obtaining it or facilitating its reception; it followed upon it, as presupposing its existence already." However, God in his grace gave Abraham circumcision as a sign and a seal of his righteousness. "The value of circumcision consisted, therefore, just in this: that it marked Abraham out, by a visible sign, as one who had received this righteousness from God and was henceforth to be the Lord's, and it sealed that righteousness to him under a covenant promise."

We may, therefore, make it a third principle that *the rites or ceremonies that do have value have it because they have been established by God as signs of his grace and seals of his covenant promises.*

A Sign

I know there are some who will think that for a message purporting to be about water baptism, I have spent an excessive amount of time discussing circumcision. But I believe the discussion is essential, not only because of the close associations between the two—both are acts initiating a person into the body of God's people—but also because the most detailed New Testament discussion of the place of a rite or ceremony involves circumcision. Clearly this was because circumcision was a problem for the early Christian evangelists and needed discussion, while baptism, in spite of its obvious similarities to circumcision, was not. What is more, the discussion of circumcision has been useful, for it has given us the two terms—"sign" and "seal"—that are most useful in understanding Christian baptism.

The first of these two terms, then, is a "sign." What is a sign? Quite simply, a sign is a visible object designed to point to a reality different from itself and greater. In the case of the sacraments the sign is outward and visible, and the reality to which it points is inward and spiritual. Baptism with water points to our identification with Jesus Christ by means of the Holy Spirit.

Baptism identifies us as being the Lord's. It does not make us the Lord's, but it is the sign that identifies us as belonging to him. Several

years ago when I was traveling across the western part of the United States with my family I began to come across signs advising the traveler that he was approaching "Joe's Wigwam." It was a desolate area. The signs were large. So probably for most persons traveling through that area of the country, the signs became the number one source of entertainment for many miles. The first sign read, "50 miles to Joe's Wigwam"; the next sign: "40 miles to Joe's Wigwam." There was a sign for 30 miles, then 20, 15, 10, 5, 3, and 1. The next sign was an attention getter: "Get Ready! It's Coming!" And then another: "Only 500 Feet." Suddenly, there it was—a large gift shop with a motel and a gas station—and over it the largest sign of all: "Joe's Wigwam." I can almost guarantee that no one who passes through that section of the country ever goes into the gift shop, motel, or gas station and asks, "By the way, who owns this place?" Joe owns it, of course! The signs are there to point to it and indicate this fact.

It is in this sense that Christian baptism is a sign. It does not make a person a Christian any more than Joe's sign gives him tide to the gift shop, motel, and gas station. Baptism simply indicates that he is now a Christian.

Moreover, this is not just true in reference to the unbelieving world. Baptism does have a reference to that. It is our way of telling the world that we are not our own, that we have been bought with a price, that we have been identified with Jesus. That is true. But it is also true that it speaks to ourselves. It has been reported of Martin Luther that he had hours when he seemed to be confused about everything, no doubt because of the strain and mental fatigue of being for twenty-eight years in the forefront of the Protestant Reformation in Germany. He questioned the value of the Reformation; he questioned his faith; he even questioned the work of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. But during those hours, we are told, he would write in chalk on his table the two words: *Baptizatus sum*! I have been baptized! Thus he would reassure himself that he really was Christ's and that he had been identified with him in his death and resurrection.

I must interject a word here lest anyone think that because I have referred to Luther in this way, I am assigning some magical property to baptism. That is not the case. Baptism is a sign, not a transaction. In fact, it was actually the failure to see this, coupled with the desire to give the sacrament status as a means of grace entirely on its own that led to the abuse of baptism first in the early Roman Catholic church and then also in the sixteenth century in the various church groupings that resulted from the Protestant Reformation.

The Roman church led the way by ascribing a value to the sacraments in themselves and then elevating them to a position over against preaching and the receiving of biblical knowledge. When this happened, it was the sacrament rather than belief that became necessary for salvation. In the case of baptism there arose the peculiar custom of delaying baptism until the last possible moment before death in order that the greatest number of sins might be washed away by it. In certain sectors of the Protestant church, the same views are expressed through the existence of a sacerdotal priesthood, the elevation of the communion table conceived as an altar, and occasionally even by the language used at either the Lord's Supper or the administration of baptism.

All these practices are inconsistent with the biblical teaching regarding baptism and the Lord's Supper. Thus we lay them aside in order to adhere to the view that sees the sacraments as a sign and a seal of God's covenant.

God's Seal

That brings us to the second point. Baptism is a sign, but it is also a seal. So we ask ourselves, "In what sense is baptism a seal? What is meant by a seal anyway?"

In our day the use of official seals is diminishing, but we still have enough examples to remind us of a seal's significance. If you have ever gone abroad, you will have gone through the experience of procuring a passport, which bears the seal of the United States of America. It is

stamped into the paper in such a way that it is impossible to remove or change it, and it validates the passport. Furthermore, if you have ever had to swear to the truth of some statement before a notary public, you would have seen him affix his seal to the document, thereby confirming the oath that you made before him.

In ancient times seals were in much greater use. Since most men, even the very rich or important, could not write, a seal was the equivalent of one's signature. Men carried their seals with them, and they affixed them to letters or documents as a pledge of their work and as a recognition of their responsibility. If we put the two ideas together—the idea of an official seal and a signature—we get some idea of the meaning of a seal in regard to baptism. By receiving baptism we indicate that we are the Lord Jesus Christ's. His name has been affixed to us; his seal on us is evidence that he stands behind his promises.

Once again let me quote from Warfield. "There is nothing in the whole history of the people of God which they value more highly, on which they more deeply felicitate themselves, on which they more securely depend, than that they are called by the name of the Lord. It was to this fact that they appealed when in their affliction they turned to the Hope of Israel, the Savior thereof in time of trouble: 'Thou, O Jehovah, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not' (Jer. 14:9). It was in this that their jubilation reached its height: 'I am called by thy name, O Jehovah, God of hosts' (Jer. 15:16)."

Thus, says Warfield, "When our Lord commanded his disciples to baptize those whom in their world-wide mission they should draw to Christ 'into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,' precisely what he bade them do was to call them by the name of the Triune God, that they might be marked out as his and sealed to him as an eternal possession."

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, this is what God has done with you. You have been called to Christ. His name has been affixed to you, and you are now sealed to him as a valued and eternal possession.

Sealed with the Spirit

There is one final point. It is the fact that in the New Testament the word "seal" is actually always applied to the Holy Spirit rather than to the administration of water baptism. This does not mean that water baptism does not have the characteristics of a seal as we have discussed them, but it does mean that the work of the Holy Spirit is so great and so real that the term is reserved quite naturally almost exclusively for his baptism. Thus we are told that when we believed in Christ we "were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (Eph. 1:13) and that we were "sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30).

This is our true security as God's people. In the Book of Ezekiel there is a prophecy that concerns God's dealings with Israel at the end of history. Six men enter Jerusalem to pronounce judgment upon the inhabitants, but before they go in, one man clothed in linen and carrying a writing kit enters to "put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done" in Israel (Ezek. 9:4). Afterward the others are told, "Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark" (v. 6).

In the same way, you and I and all who believe in the Lord Jesus are identified by the Holy Spirit of God as Christ's men, as Christians. We are made secure in that identification. The Bible says, "God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his" And it adds, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness" (2 Tim. 2:19).

Chapter 24.
You Shall See Angels

John 1:51

I wonder if you have ever had a particularly delightful experience and then discovered to your added delight that there was much more of the same to be enjoyed? I remember one experience like that that I had at a very early age. Someone had given me a book that contained one of the adventures of the Hardy boys, two young brothers whose father was a detective, who were always getting mixed up in his adventures. I thought it was one of a kind when I received it, and I loved it. It was a fascinating adventure. But then, imagine my added delight when I discovered that the book I owned was only one of a long series of books with the same characters and that I had only touched the surface of their adventures in my reading.

That kind of experience is one we all have at different periods of our lives. I know you have had it. What I would like to see, however, is that this is also an experience that you can have spiritually. That is, you can learn something particularly wonderful about Jesus, have moments of wonderful fellowship with him, experience his power, and then know that the pleasure can be enjoyed increasingly forever.

What are the words that characterize the Lord Jesus Christ? He is *eternal.* This means that he is without beginning and without ending. He antedates time. He goes beyond it. He is completely independent of it. Length of days does not exhaust him. Jesus Christ is also *immutable,* as God is. That means that he does not change and will never change. He is *omniscient.* There is nothing known or to be known that he does not already know, and all our knowledge is simply our thinking his thoughts after him. Because he is omniscient there will also be no end to our own growth in knowledge as his children. He is perfect and inexhaustible in his *love.* Nothing will mar our experience of his love; nothing will diminish it. His *mercy* and *righteousness* and *holiness* will be a never-ending pleasure for those whom he has redeemed. What can exhaust the inexhaustible? What finite mind can plumb the infinite? It is impossible. Certainly, at his right hand there will be "eternal pleasures" (Ps. 16:11).

The Problem

In a general way this is quite clearly the point of the very last verse of John 1. The first chapter of John reveals Jesus in a variety of contexts and under an unusual variety of names. He is the Word, the Light, the Lamb, the Son of God, Rabbi, the Messiah, the King of Israel. These titles culminate in the confession of Nathanael who, after some initial skepticism, declares, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel" (v. 49). At this point, however, Jesus answers that all the insight and experience that these confessions embody, wonderful as they are, are only a prelude to an infinite series of such experiences that lie ahead. That is, there is more to come. He therefore declares, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (v. 51).

In a general way the idea of additional delightful experiences for those who have believed on Jesus lies at the heart of this verse. But when we try to go beyond this, when we hunt for a more precise reference, we run into problems. The verse is a promise, but a promise of what? To be even more explicit, when is heaven opened and when are angels to be seen? Exactly what is this verse talking about?

This is not just a problem for us in our age, of course. It has been a problem for many interpreters down through the years of church history. Why? The difficulty lies not so much in finding an explanation for the verse or a reference for it—many have done that—but in finding an explanation or reference that deals with each of the parts of the puzzle.

There is a puzzle that I am sure many people have seen, made of several pieces of cardboard of various shapes that are to be combined into a square. If you have ever attempted to do this puzzle, you know that it is not difficult to make a square. In fact, you can make several squares of different sizes. The difficulty is that there always seem to be one or more pieces left over. The puzzle is solved only when a square is made in which all the pieces are utilized. It is the same in our handling of John 1:51. This is a puzzle with four pieces, the four major parts of the verse: (1) the reference to the future you *shall* see; (2) the fact that the heavens will open; (3) the reference to angels ascending and descending upon Jesus; and (4) the title given by Jesus to himself, "the Son of

Man." Any good explanation of the verse should explain each of these four parts.

There are a number of explanations that refer to just one. Probably the most popular explanation in contemporary books is the one that links the verse to the vision of Jacob in which he saw angels ascending and descending upon a ladder from heaven (Gen. 28:12). The difficulty with this view is in finding a reason why Jesus should allude to Jacob in this context. It is true that Jacob was a type of Christ in one sense. He is the man who left home to find a bride in a foreign country, just as Christ left heaven to redeem his bride, the church. But this is a bit farfetched. And it does not help us much to imagine that Nathanael might have been reading about the Jacob story when Philip called him.

Some explanations refer to a ministry of angels to Jesus during Jesus' lifetime. But the difficulty with this view is that this happened only twice during the lifetime of Jesus, once at the close of his temptation by Satan in the wilderness and once in Gethsemane, and neither Nathanael, Andrew, or Philip was present on these occasions.

In Luther's exposition of these chapters, the father of the Reformation calls attention to the heavens being opened and notes that this also happened twice. It happened at Jesus' baptism (when the dove descended, but not angels), and it happened at his transfiguration. However, as Luther notes, only three of the apostles saw heaven opened at the transfiguration. None saw it at the baptism. Therefore, says Luther, "This story must be interpreted spiritually." Luther refers the story to the church and to the access that all believers have through Christ to heaven.

Is this the explanation? Does this explain the four pieces of the puzzle? I do not think so. On the other hand, I think there is an explanation that does. According to this explanation, when Jesus said, "You shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man," he was not talking about anything that took place during the lifetime of Nathanael. Nor was he talking about anything that took place either in the lifetime of Philip or Andrew or any of the other

disciples or even of you and me. He was talking about something that is still future, that is still to come. In other words, although no one has seen the fulfillment of this verse yet, all will one day see it when Jesus Christ returns.

When you take the verse in this sense, all the elements of the verse fall into place. "You shall see" becomes genuinely future, and not just for Nathanael. The heavens are to be opened literally. Angels will accompany Jesus. And the phrase "the Son of Man" receives its true reference as that defined for us in the seventh chapter of the Book of Daniel. "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (vv. 13-14). This explanation even makes sense of several other verses in the Gospels in which Jesus declared that "the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done" (Matt. 16:27), and again, "In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64).

Clouds of Glory

If we are to understand this great event, we need to understand first of all that it is a moment of great joy and rejoicing for Christ's followers. Unfortunately, for many Christians today the return of Jesus Christ does not seem to be an event of great joy. They are far from him in fellowship and will be ashamed at his coming.

Revelation 19 portrays this event most graphically, and here all is triumphant. Heaven is astir, and in heaven a great host of persons are shouting hallelujahs. Hallelujah means "praise to Jehovah." First, a great many people shout, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God." After this a great multitude shouts again, "Hallelujah." The twenty-four elders and the four cherubim fall down

and worship God, crying, "Amen, Hallelujah." Finally a great multitude exclaim, "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns." The picture is one of great joy, for everything is prepared for the Lord's appearing. The Lamb's wife, the glorified church, is ready, clothed in fine linen, clean and white.

Then the chapter proceeds, "I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed which no one knows, but himself. He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings, and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:11-16 RSV).

This scene is the fulfillment of the promise Jesus made to Nathanael, and it is one in which you and I shall participate. We shall praise him. We shall glory in his triumphs.

Thou art coming, O my Savior,
Thou art coming, O my King,
In thy beauty all resplendent;

In thy glory all transcendent;
Well may we rejoice and sing:
Coming! in the opening east
Herald brightness slowly swells;
Coming! O my glorious Priest,
Hear we not thy golden bells?
Thou art coming, thou art coming;
We shall meet thee on thy way,

We shall see thee, we shall
know thee, We shall bless
thee, we shall show thee
All our hearts could never
say:
What an anthem that will be,
Ringing out our love to thee,
Pouring out our rapture sweet
At thine own all-glorious feet.
O the joy to see thee reigning,
Thee, my own beloved Lord!
Ev'ry tongue thy Name confessing,
Worship, honor, glory, blessing
Brought to thee with glad accord;
Thee, my Master and my Friend,
Vindicated and enthroned,
Unto earth's remotest end
Glorified, adored and owned.

Does that mean anything to you? It should mean a great deal. In this world you and I often find ourselves as a very small minority as Christians, and we are often discouraged. We wonder how we are ever going to get through this year, this week, this day. How will we ever bear a witness? We would find much of our thinking along these lines transformed if we would only learn to see ourselves as servants of this great Jesus, this King of kings and Lord of lords, who is returning one day on the clouds of heaven with his holy angels.

Day of Judgment

We need to see one thing more. It is true that the scene we have been looking at is a scene of glory, but it is also true that it is a scene of judgment for those who have not responded to the preaching of God's grace through the gospel. This is seen in the imagery of the passage. Revelation 19 describes the garments worn by Jesus as having been dipped in blood, and we are told that he has been treading out "the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty" (v. 15).

Are you prepared to meet this Christ when he returns? The prophet Daniel was one of the Hebrews who was carried into Babylon when Jerusalem was conquered in the sixth century B.C., and he rose to prominence in Babylon, serving as a minister of state under three successive kings. The second of these kings was Belshazzar. One evening Belshazzar threw a party and invited one thousand of his nobles. It was to be a splendid evening. Picture one thousand nobles dressed in the most regal robes, with gold crowns on their heads, lords of a powerful and farflung empire, heroes of battlefields. Imagine the banquet, the wine, the boastful talk, the abundance of sensual pleasure! Suddenly, in the midst of the revelry, the laughter begins to die away, for a hand has appeared writing on the wall of the palace above the king's table. The words written are, "*Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*." No one can interpret them. The queen suggests that they find Daniel, who can interpret visions. When Daniel arrives at the banquet hall and sees the writing, he cries, "God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. ...You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. ...Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians." The revelers listen in stunned silence. Some perhaps are skeptical. But that night the city is entered, and Darius the Mede reigns on Belshazzar's former throne.

So it is in our own chaotic century. The world is engaged in its banquet. The laughter grows louder, the food is more and more lavish. Revelers indulge in their sensual pleasure. But the banquet is almost over. The last course is about to be served. Soon the hand will appear, and the words of judgment will be pronounced. Where are you in that picture? Are you in the banquet hall? Or are you among those who wait for the coming of the Lord of lords in glory and yearn for the marriage supper of the Lamb?

Chapter 25.
What's in a Name?

John 1:1-51

In the title song of the very successful and at times quite beautiful rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar,* the chorus asks movingly:

Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ,
Who are you? What have you sacrificed?
Jesus Christ Superstar,
Do you think you're what they say you are?

In one form or another this question has been asked by many thousands of persons down through history, and many different answers have been given. In the last century alone approximately 60,000 books have sought to explain Jesus. Those writing them have differed widely. So, for many who do not know the biblical replies, the question about who Jesus is goes unanswered.

Fortunately, the Bible does answer the question, and nowhere is it answered in more detail and in a shorter space than in the first chapter of John's Gospel.

Commentators have often noticed the number and variety of names or titles given to Jesus in the fifty-one verses of John 1. What has not been noticed is that the titles have been arranged by John to show in chronological sequence who Jesus is, what he has done, and what he is yet to do. Thus they begin with Jesus as the Word, as he was with God from the beginning. They trace him through the years of his incarnation as the Light, the Lamb of God, the Son of God, and Rabbi. And they deal with things yet to come under the names: Messiah, King of Israel, and Son of Man, the last of which refers to Jesus' role in the final judgment. I believe that it is possible to trace the significance of the past, present, and future ministry of Christ in sequence by means of these titles.

Biblical Names

For us names generally do not mean very much. In the East and in the Bible it is otherwise.

Every careful reader of the Bible must often have been struck with the significance of the divine names revealed to various men in the Scriptures. Abraham, the father of our faith, received a progressive revelation of the character of God by means of God's names. Early in his life Abraham had come to know God *as, Jehovah,* which means "I am that I am." It was the revelation of God as Jehovah that sent Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees toward what was later to become the land of Israel. After he had done battle with five kings, Abraham learned to know God as *El Elyon.* This means "the Most High God" and identifies him as the possessor of the heavens and the earth. At the time of the birth of Isaac through a miracle, God was revealed as *El Shaddai,* "God Almighty." Finally, on the mountain God disclosed that he was also *Jehovah Jireh,* which means "the Lord will provide."

Similar revelations were given to Jacob, Moses, David, and the prophets, and all are striking. In fact, they are so striking that many scholars have traced the history of God's revelation of himself to Israel by means of them.

In *The Revelation of the Father,* Anglican Bishop B. F. Westcott has written, "Of God as he is in himself, in his absolute and unapproachable majesty, we can as yet know nothing. But the names by which we are allowed to address him gather up what is shown to us ... of his working and of his will. The divine names receive and reflect scattered rays of heavenly truth as men can bear their effulgence; and when they have been set in our spiritual firmament they burn for ever. Thus each name authoritatively given to God is, so to speak, a fresh and lasting revelation of his nature. Now in one title and now in another we catch glimpses of his ineffable glory."

We also catch glimpses of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ by means of such titles. And we may study them, particularly those included by John the evangelist, in order to see the entire sweep of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ from the beginning to the end. That this can be done is itself interesting, for it is John's way of saying that Jesus is truly

the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. It is the purpose of John's Gospel to reveal him.

The Word

The first title is "Word." It occurs three times in verse 1 and is repeated once more in verse 14.
We read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

We have already seen that this title refers to Jesus as the Creator and as the One who, by being God, reveals God. When a thoughtful man of Jewish background would read these verses, he would undoubtedly think of the first chapter of Genesis, in which God speaks and all things come into being. Clearly John is associating Jesus with God the Father in this creative activity. A Greek would read the title and think of his ancient philosophy. To him the *logos* or "word" would refer first of all to the controlling principle of this world. To each of these men, Jew and Greek, John declares that the God who created the world and who previously could only be most imperfectly known is fully revealed in Jesus.

Jesus is not only the first and most complete Word of God, he is also the last Word. No one will find God apart from him.

The Light

The second name for the Lord Jesus Christ is "Light. "John says, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it" (vv. 4-5). Later he tells us that John the Baptist came to bear witness to the Light, and he adds, "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world" (v. 9).

It is obvious that in one sense "Light" simply reinforces one of the ideas already suggested by referring to Jesus as the "Word." Light is a universal image for the illumination of the understanding through

revelation. We express the idea when we say, "Well, the light finally came on," or "he finally saw the light," referring to someone who has just understood something. In this sense, the idea of light reinforces the idea of God's revelation of himself through Jesus.

Yet there is an additional idea in the thought of Jesus' being the Light that makes this title distinct from the former one. It is the contrast of light with darkness. The point is that Jesus is the Light, while men are in darkness because of sin and disobedience. They move out of the darkness only when they come to Jesus.

Many great thinkers have found this. Emile Cailliet, former professor of philosophy at Princeton Theological Seminary, is an example. Dr. Cailliet was highly educated in France in the period before and after the First World War, but his education was naturalistic to the core. He never even saw a Bible until the war was over and he was nearing the end of his studies. These were his years of darkness; his life was described then, as he says, by the title of Eugene O'Neill's play, *Long Day's Journey into Night.* Now, however, his life is a *journey into light,* and he describes it as a discovery of his own sin and Christ's righteousness through finding Jesus himself through the Bible.

He has written of this discovery in his book *Journey into Light*: "A decisive insight flashed through my whole being the following morning as I probed the opening chapters of the Gospel according to John. The very clue to the secret of human life was disclosed right there, not stated in the foreboding language of philosophy, but in the common, everyday language of human circumstances. And, far from moving on their own accord, these circumstances seemed to yield themselves without striving, obedient unto One who inexorably stood out from the gospel narrative—indeed a Person of far more than human nature and stature."

No doubt John was trying to encourage such confessions as he sought to describe the One who leads us all out of darkness into his marvelous light.

The Lamb of God

The most important title is the one that comes next in this chapter, for it is the title that refers to Jesus' work of redemption. It is "the Lamb of God." It occurs in the Baptist's declaration, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (vv. 29, 36). All the wealth of the Old Testament symbolism in the sacrifices of the patriarchs and of the Mosaic law throws weight on this title, for it shows Jesus to be the sin-bearer, the Passover, the innocent substitute dying in our place. This great truth of substitution—the bearing of the sinner's guilt and penalty by another— is carried over from the Old Testament to the New Testament by means of this metaphor and made an integral part of the gospel message.

This is what Jesus Christ came to do. He came to remove our sin by dying in our place as our substitute. Has he done that for you? Are your sins upon him? Has he borne your reproach? Has he suffered for your iniquity? The Bible says that he will be the Lamb of God for you, if you will confess your sin and trust him to remove it forever.

Son of God

In verse 34 John the Baptist concludes his formal testimony by giving Jesus a fourth title: the "Son of God" (cf. v. 49). There are some critics today, although not as many as there were in the last century, who have sought to lessen this title by denying that Jesus was the Son of God in any unique sense. According to such teachers, Jesus was a son only in the sense that all men are supposed to be "sons" by creation. Actually, this is untenable, and any honest evaluation of the biblical evidences must recognize that Jesus is declared to be God's Son in a way that makes him entirely unique and divine.

At his birth the angel declared, "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32); he "will be called the Son of God" (v. 35). God the Father bore witness to him on several occasions declaring, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11; 9:7). The titles "Son of God" and "Son of the Most High God" were used by demons in recognition of his unique authority and divinity (Matt. 4:3, 6; Mark 3:11; 5:7; Luke 4:41). Peter said, "You are

the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). It is as God's Son that Christ reigns and exercises authority in the lives of those who have come to him.

Rabbi

Jesus is next called "Rabbi," which means "teacher" (John 1:38). Is he your teacher? The greatest mistake you could ever make is to think that he can be your teacher before he has become your Savior.

That was the mistake made by Nicodemus, whose story is told just two chapters later in this Gospel. Nicodemus came to Jesus, saying, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (John 3:2). In other words, Nicodemus was very impressed with Jesus and wanted to be instructed by him. But this will not work spiritually. A man must first see Jesus as the Lamb of God and the Son of God before he can have him as Rabbi. Consequently, Jesus replied to Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (v. 3). If you want the Lord Jesus Christ as your teacher, he will be your teacher. He will show you great and wondrous things out of his Word, so that your heart will burn within you (Luke 24:32). But first, he must be your Savior.

Messiah, King, Son of Man

The last three titles refer to Christ's future actions and may be taken together. They occur toward the end of the chapter. When Andrew calls Simon to Jesus, Andrew declares, "We have found the Messiah" which, John tells us, means "the Christ" (John 1:41). After Nathanael comes to Jesus and recognizes that Philip's claims regarding him are true, Nathanael exclaims, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel" (v. 49). Finally, Jesus replies, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (v. 51). These three titles—Messiah, King of Israel, and Son of man—refer to two aspects of Jesus' ministry.

The first two titles have to do with his ministry to Judaism. Jesus is Israel's Messiah. He is Israel's king. For this reason I believe that the time will yet come when Jesus will reign over Israel from Jerusalem as the prophets foretold (Isa. 24:23; Zech. 14:9, 16).

The final title is clearly also messianic, but it refers to judgment upon the Gentiles. It is derived from the seventh chapter of Daniel. "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (Dan. 7:13-14; cf. Matt. 13:41-43; 24:27, 30; 25:31-46). The scene is one of judgment and of everlasting rule.

Fortunately, the scene of Christ's judgment is still future; and you, if you do not yet know him as the Lamb who takes away your sin, have time to prepare for it. Quite a few years ago, after World War II, an official government study, called the Pearl Harbor Report, demonstrated that no one was prepared for the disaster that struck on the morning of December 7, 1941. The admirals and generals were unprepared; the authorities were unprepared; the nation was unprepared. There was a total lack of preparation, in spite of the ample evidence that existed indicating that a devastating attack would be coming.

Thus will Christ's future judgment as the Son of man appear to the world. We are told it is coming. Men are warned to flee from the wrath of God. Yet the judgment will fall suddenly and unexpectedly upon the many who are sunk in a lethargy of affluence and self-satisfaction. Some will meet the Lord Jesus as their judge. How much better to meet him as the Lamb of God who has taken away sin, as teacher, Savior, and Lord.

Chapter 26.

The First Miracle

John 2:1-11

In the fourteenth chapter of the Book of Romans there is a verse that says: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (v. 17). In our day many Christians have gotten the part about righteousness right. Many even have peace. But as I look about at contemporary Christianity, it seems to me that many are sadly lacking in joy. They have the doctrine right and are even secure in salvation. But there is none of the supernatural joy and exuberance that is to be one of the outward marks of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in a Christian.

This is unfortunate, of course, and it is not right. The Bible tells us that one fruit of the Spirit is 'joy" (Gal. 5:22). Psalm 32:11 declares: "Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!" In Psalm 16 we read: "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (v. 11). Jesus declared, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11).

According to these verses, the life of the Christian is to be characterized by joy, not by that superficial, raucous joy of which the world is capable, of course, but by that divine and desirable joy that characterized the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Where do we learn of that joy? I believe that one place is in the verses to which we come now in our study of John's Gospel.

Jesus Was Welcome

These verses tell us a story. "On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding" (John 2:1-2). According to the chronology that John gives us for these opening chapters, this was the last of the seven original and eventful days of Christ's ministry. The first

was the day on which John the Baptist confronted the Jewish delegation from Jerusalem. The second was the day on which John identified Jesus for the first time as "the Lamb of God." On the third day Andrew and an unnamed disciple (probably John the evangelist) followed Jesus. The fourth day contained the events connected with Andrew's call of his brother Peter. On the fifth day Jesus called Nathanael. The sixth day was spent in traveling. On the seventh day Jesus arrived in Cana and was invited with his disciples to the wedding.

This is also the day on which the public ministry of Jesus began officially. Consequently, the opening verses of chapter 2 are really an introduction to the second main section of the Gospel (chaps. 2-11), which some scholars have called "the book of Christ's signs."

It is an interesting sidelight on these verses that under Jewish law the normal day for a wedding was Wednesday, the day of the week prescribed for the wedding of a virgin. If that is the case here, then we are able to work backward to find that it was the Sabbath when Andrew and the other disciple followed Jesus and spent the day with him. Thus, we have an explanation for their inactivity.

But we must return to this story. Why was Jesus invited to this wedding? We do not know for certain. It is possible that he had been invited to it in advance and had been on his way to it when he called Philip and Nathanael. It may be that the invitation came through Nathanael, for we are told later that Cana of Galilee was Nathanael's hometown (John 21:2). It may be that Jesus was invited because of his mother Mary, who seems to have had a prominent place at the feast. Whatever the case, the point seems to be that Jesus was welcome. And, as I read the story, I seem to sense that the invitation came to him at once as soon as the men and women of Cana learned that he had returned to Galilee from the area of the lower Jordan, where John was baptizing.

I think this point is important, for this is the first of many stories suggesting that Jesus was always welcome among those who were having a good time. Have you ever thought how wonderful it is that

Jesus was at home in such company? I am afraid that if some Christians I know were the pattern, there would be very little to expect of true joy and happiness or good times in the Christian life. Some Christians go around with grim looks and long faces. If they ever find themselves in the company of someone else who is having a good time, they immediately suspect that the cause of the fun is either illegal, immoral, or fattening. Jesus was not like that. He did not condemn those who were enjoying themselves, and he was not jealous of them. As a result, he was welcome at their gatherings, and those who had invited him listened to his teachings.

Are you like that? If you are, you may find that people are not only pleased with your company; they may also be willing to listen to your testimony.

Let me tell you a true incident that illustrates this aspect of John's story. A friend of mine, who is now a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, was asked to speak at a banquet that would be attended by the young adult group of a certain church. He had never heard of the church before, or the young adult group, but he went to the banquet and spoke about the call of Christ to the unsaved and about discipleship. After the dinner and his address my friend was ready to go home, but he discovered that this was only the prelude to the evening. The dinner was followed by a wild party at which, as he told me, the noise was so loud that it was almost impossible to talk to anyone. He concluded—and he was right, as it later turned out—that the group was composed mostly of those who were Christian in name only. But what should he do? Should he go home, declaring that Christians do not go to wild parties and that this was a most unfortunate sequel to his talk? Or should he stay, enjoying the good time of the others as much as possible?

My friend decided to stay with the group. During the first few minutes he was there, a girl came up to talk to him. She had been impressed by what he had said at the dinner, but she did not understand it. She asked him to explain again what it means to be a Christian. My friend said that at this point the noise was so loud the two of them had to shout to each other even though their mouths were only inches from each other's

ears. But the shouting was worthwhile, for the girl believed and became a Christian. The sequel to the story is that the girl was apparently the key to the whole group. She became a dynamic witness to her friends. Through her witness most of the group believed. She later died of a brain hemorrhage, suddenly, at the age of 25; but at that time others believed. One young man, who believed, then went on to influence hundreds.

I believe, of course, that there may be environments from which most Christians should stand free. Yet we often apply that thought adversely and forget to be cheerful. Charles Spurgeon once wrote to his students: "Sepulchral tones may fit a man to be an undertaker, but Lazarus is not called out of his grave by hollow moans. ...I commend cheerfulness to all who would win souls."

They Have No Wine

I do not want anyone to misunderstand me at this point, thinking that I am commending the good times of this world as something superior to the joy of true Christianity. I am not. On the contrary, I believe that, although the Christian should not hold aloof from any genuinely good experiences, it should be the *superior* joy of the Christian that most commends the Lord Jesus Christ to unbelievers.

But this, too, is involved in the story. As the story goes on it is seen that the wine required for the feast is exhausted. This may not mean much to us in a day when practically any lack may be made up by a quick trip to the corner market. But it was a serious thing in those days when a lack could not be easily remedied and when the shortage (if discovered) would certainly prove a great embarrassment to the host. What is more, as we read the various things that the Bible has to say about wine, we soon discover that wine was a symbol of joy. The rabbis said, "Without wine there is no joy." So, to run out of wine would almost have been the equivalent of admitting that neither the guests nor the bride and groom were happy.

We see the symbolism of the wine in Psalm 104:15, which praises the Lord for giving "wine that gladdens the heart of man." In Judges we are told that Jotham recited a parable about the trees of the forest to the men of Shechem in which the vine declined to rule in the forest because, it said, "Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and men, to hold sway over the trees?" (Judg. 9:13). In Isaiah we are invited to "Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost" (Isa. 55:1).

Certainly, John, who always sees the spiritual meaning in the most ordinary events, is suggesting that apart from Jesus the joy of which men are capable is limited and that good times that are nothing more than good times will run out. One young man who had tasted most of what the world has to offer once said to a Christian worker, "My God, is this all there is to life?" It was the worker's privilege to lead him to the source of all life and joy, Jesus.

At this point Mary came to Jesus with the veiled request that he do something. She said, "They have no wine. "Jesus, who understood the tone of her statement, replied, "Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come" (John 2:4). These words sound harsh to our ears, but they did not have a harsh sound in the original language. "Woman" was a title of respect, much like our word "lady." We remember that Jesus used it again when he was addressing his mother from the cross as he committed her into John's safekeeping. The point of Jesus' reply was that he was not ready to do anything openly because the "hour" of his crucifixion was still years away.

I sense in the story the fact that Mary, who certainly knew her son well, must have detected a change in Jesus' life since his departure from Nazareth; and she could not have failed to notice that he had returned with at least five disciples. Perhaps she was thinking, "Now is the time. Now he should declare himself openly." After all, Mary was only a Jewish mother, and she must have had a mother's ambition for her exceptional son, the rabbi.

Jesus, of course, knew that his times were in the hands of his Father in heaven. He would not be manipulated. And yet—this is a wonderful

part of the story—he had no desire to allow the lack of joy or embarrassment either. So he moved quietly. There were six great water jars of stone standing by, containing water used for Jewish purifications. He commanded the servants to fill them with water, which they did—to the brim! When they had done so, he then told them to draw from the pots and carry the water (now made wine) to the master of the banquet, whom we would call the best man or the master of ceremonies. They did so; when the master of the banquet had tasted the wine he said to the bridegroom, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now" (v. 10).

That too is significant. It was *good* wine! It was the *best!* No wonder the Bible tells us that "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). Jesus himself said, "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matt. 7:11.)

Moreover, have you ever reflected on the quantity of wine Jesus produced? John tells us, probably as an eyewitness, that there were six stone water jars, each containing two or three firkins apiece. That makes twelve to eighteen firkins. Each firkin was the equivalent of nine or ten gallons. Consequently, Jesus must have produced between a hundred eight and a hundred eighty gallons of the very best wine. In his excellent commentary *The Gospel of John,* William Barclay, that impeccable Englishman, is so startled by the amount of wine that he thinks it should not be taken with "crude literalness." He says, "No wedding party on earth could drink one hundred and eighty gallons of wine." But I think the amount is literal and, what is more, that Jesus intentionally produced the wine in abundance.

Do not think, if you come to Jesus, accepting him as your Savior, that the day will come when you will find yourself empty of joy, or disappointed. If that ever happens, it will be because you have drawn away from him, not because he has failed you. Certainly the Christ who

produced the abundance of wine, who oversupplied with the loaves and fishes, who said, "He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35)— certainly such a Christ is able to supply all your need "according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

Christ or Religion

There is one last point that must also be seen in this story. When John concludes his telling of it, he adds, "This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him" (v. 11). Actually, the word that is translated as "miracles" in this verse is the word "signs," and in John a sign is always something that points to a reality greater than itself. Or, to use another word, we could say that the miracles are also, in addition to being literal events, symbolic.

We ask then: Is there something symbolized here that we have not yet covered? I believe there is. We remember, first of all, that throughout the Gospel, John is very sensitive to the fact that Jesus brought to completion and therefore in a sense displaced the religion of the Jews. We notice too that he calls attention to the use of the water jars in the Jewish household; they were for the Jewish purifications. We remember that he has spoken of the blindness of the Jewish people, particularly the leaders, just one chapter before this. In this context, and given John's interests, the empty water jars and the lack of wine speak of the emptiness of religion at Christ's coming. Arthur W. Pink, one of the most complete expositors of this Gospel, has written accurately on this point in his *Gospel of John*: "Judaism still existed as a religious system [there were purifications], but it ministered no comfort to the heart. It had degenerated into a cold, mechanical routine, utterly destitute of joy in God. Israel had lost the joy of their espousals."

What Pink has written of one religion is true, however, of all religion, if Jesus Christ does not stand at its core. Apart from him who is the source of life, who is himself the life, religion is a cold and lifeless thing. Apart from the joy he brings, religion is joyless and hardens personalities. Do

you have religion? It will profit you nothing! Or do you have Christ? He alone can quench the hunger and thirst of your heart. He alone can put a song in your mouth that not even the angels can sing. He alone can give you true and everlasting joy.

Chapter 27.
Was Jesus Christ a Revolutionary?

John 2:12-17

A person does not need to be an expert in current events to know that we live in an age of impending revolution. The call to revolution has been raised by communism. Radical groups forecast revolution for America. In the student world—whether it be in Los Angeles, New York, Moscow, Paris, Tokyo, Havana, or Djakarta, wherever students gather—there are millions who debate the nature of the revolutionary days in which we live and there are thousands who urge revolution. "We are going to change the world" is the claim of many persons—and, indeed, they may just do it!

But the secular world does not have a monopoly on sounding the call to revolution. It has also echoed from the sanctuaries of the churches. In many of the major denominations, radical clerics have sought to align the prestige of their denominations behind particular sociological and political objectives, some of which, according to their advocates, are to be obtained by destroying the present systems of social order and government. This segment of Christendom often points to actions and teachings of Jesus that are thought to support their objectives.

Was Jesus Christ a revolutionary? That question is of crucial importance for Christians who wish guidance for their actions in our time. Was he a revolutionary? The answer to that question, as I hope to show, is "No, he was not." He was not a revolutionary in the way most people understand that word. On the other hand, he was not a defender of the establishment either, and it is correct to say that he actually called men

and women to a revolution (although a peaceful one) that was far more radical and long-term than anything that people then would in themselves have dreamed possible.

Pros and Cons

One of the most valuable of the recent books on this subject is a highly condensed monograph by Oscar Cullmann, recently of the universities of Basel and Paris, entitled *Jesus and the Revolutionaries*. In it he points out the complexity of the issues.

On the one hand, notes Cullmann, there are certainly elements in Christ's sayings that allow some radicals to see him as their ally. In Christ's day in Israel there were men known as Zealots (from the Greek word *zevos*, meaning "zeal"). The Zealots were fanatical in their concern for Jewish law and in their expectation of the imminent dawning of the kingdom of God. Many carried swords or daggers that were frequently used in political killings. Hence they were also called Sicarii, which is a Latin term meaning "cutthroats" or "assassins." In time the Zealots produced a politico-religious revolt that led to the Jewish war against the Romans beginning in a.d. 66. As a result of this war Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman general Titus in a.d. 70. After the fall of Jerusalem one Zealot group continued the resistance until a.d. 74 in the mountain stronghold of Masada, which is a shrine today.

Against this background there are certain elements that have led some scholars to see Christ in this coloring. Jesus, as well as the Zealots, proclaimed that the kingdom of God was at hand. Jesus was critical of Herod, whom he called "that fox" (Luke 13:32). He was executed officially for his alleged Zealot activities (Matt. 27:37). He had among his disciples at least one, Simon the Zealot, who had been a member of a Zealot group before he became Christ's follower. Some of the disciples carried swords (Luke 22:38; John 18:10). And, most striking of all, in the passage that is the basis of our study, we are told that he cleansed the temple in Jerusalem in the midst of the very volatile days

of the Passover. Many in his day, as well as in ours, would have considered this the act of an agitator.

On the other hand, as Cullmann also points out, there are elements that reveal Jesus to be the opponent of every act of political resistance and all acts of violence. To begin with, there are the sayings on behalf of nonviolence (Matt. 5:39; 26:52). There are the exhortations to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44). Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they [not the Zealots] will be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9). On several occasions Jesus repudiated any political elements in his divine mission, principally when he was tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:8-10) and when he was tried before Pilate (John 18:36). Moreover, if some still cite the presence of a Zealot among his disciples, it must be pointed out that this is an argument that cuts both ways. For Jesus also had Matthew, a tax collector, and it is hard to find a greater representative of the establishment than that.

When we put all these texts (not just some) into the picture, we find a Jesus who goes beyond either of these two categories. And we are led to ask: What are his distinctive teachings? And, if it is true in one sense that he does call us to a revolutionary commitment, to what kind of a revolution does he call us?

No Utopias

The first point we need to see then is that whatever the cleansing of the temple may or may not have been about, it was definitely not an attempt to set up an earthly kingdom viewed as a Utopia. That was the goal of the revolutionaries, but it was not Christ's goal. In fact, if it was, it was most unsuccessful. A revolt did not come from it; and, what is more, the effects were even of short duration, for the other Gospels tell us that Jesus found it necessary to repeat the same cleansing again three years later near the end of his ministry (Matt. 21:12, 13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45, 46). Actually, if we are to take his saying about the destruction of the temple with all seriousness (Mark 13:2), it would be most accurate to say that Jesus did not attribute eternal worth to any existing institutions, even the temple and the temple worship. For in his view all

belonged to the old order that would one day come under judgment and pass away.

This truth has several important conclusions that flow from it, and we should not miss them. First, it is obviously wrong for us to deify anything human. This applies to democratic institutions as well as to those of socialism or communism. Consequently, we must not make the mistake some Americans make of identifying the American way of life or the American form of government with Christianity. The American way of life may have its good aspects (as well as its bad), some of them derived from Christianity, but America is not in itself God's kingdom.

Second, the followers of Christ are also not to take it into their hands to pronounce judgment upon their rulers. Judgment will be executed, but God alone is capable of such justice.
Consequently, in speaking of the turmoil that would take place at the end times, Jesus warned his disciples to flee from Jerusalem rather than to join in insurrections (Matt. 24:15-26). For us this means that Christians are not to take part in movements that are attempting to destroy the system.

The third conclusion is that, in the time prior to the final judgment, the state even in the hands of corrupt rulers will have a proper role. Jesus illustrated this most clearly in the story of the tribute money. One of the political parties of the day, the Herodians, had come to Jesus with a question meant to trap him into a fatal admission. They asked, "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" (Matt. 22:17). In other words, should a loyal Jew pay taxes? If Jesus said yes, he would be despised by a large section of the people, particularly the Zealots, for whom this was a point of patriotic zeal and religious honor. He would cease to be a leader. On the other hand, if he said no, then he could be denounced to the Roman authorities as an insurrectionist. What did he do? Jesus took a coin, and after pointing out that Caesar's image was on one side, he replied, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (v. 21).

There were some, no doubt, who took this reply as a compromise. There were some who accused him because of it, for it was brought up against him at his trial before Pilate: "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king" (Luke 23:2). Nevertheless, this was not Christ's teaching, Jesus acknowledged the absolute authority of God. He taught that all human institutions would one day be brought under judgment and pass away. Nevertheless, there was still a proper role for the state and a proper duty toward it. One of these duties was to pay taxes.

We may apply this point by saying that withholding taxes on the grounds that much of the tax money goes for the military is not a justifiably Christian form of social protest.

No Complacency

But we need to stop here to be sure that no one is taking this as an endorsement of the present world order or, which is also wrong, an endorsement of all the acts of our government. It is true that Jesus had no room for Utopias—except, of course, for the one that he himself was going to bring. But neither did he have room for complacency. On the contrary, he constantly called men to the most radical involvement with himself and in spiritual terms to the most revolutionary outlook possible.

In the spring in which Jesus Christ was crucified, the Roman authorities in Jerusalem had arrested a Zealot for his revolutionary activities. His name was Barabbas. The Bible tells us that the charge was for insurrection and murder, which means that Barabbas had been among the bands who were seeking to drive the Romans from Palestine by means of guerrilla tactics and political assassinations. He would have argued that life under Rome was oppressive. He was fighting the racism, the injustices, the militarism of the oppressors. Perhaps he was even a heroic, noble figure as men measure heroes. But he was arrested, and they locked him up.

Then there was Jesus, another man also charged with being a revolutionary. The Bible never suggests that they met. But if they had met, I imagine that Jesus would have agreed with much of what Barabbas was saying. He would have said, "Barabbas, your diagnosis of the system is right. The Romans boast of their justice; they are all for law and order. Herod was elected on that platform. But the administration of the law is corrupt, and they will prove it in a few hours by executing me. Moreover, you are also right about the Pharisees. They too are far more interested in preserving their own necks than they are about justice. Caiaphas himself said, 'You know nothing at all. ...It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.' You are right. There is oppression. There is racism.

"Nevertheless, you are making one big mistake. Your diagnosis is correct, but your treatment is faulty. You are being revolutionary in your attitude to the Roman and Jewish authorities. But you are not being at all revolutionary with yourself. In fact, you are being complacent. What makes you think that the system you will set up will be any less corrupt than the system you are involved in overthrowing? What makes you think that you are any more moral than the Romans or that you would act with any less self-interest than Caiaphas? I am here to tell you that you are all corrupt. The Jew is as corrupt as the Roman. The poor man is as corrupt as the rich man. The black man is as corrupt as the white man. The slave is as corrupt as his master. Consequently, you can only change things by changing people.

"Barabbas, I have come to change people. And when I change people, these people are going to revolutionize society. They will not overthrow society, but wherever they can they will attempt to set the systems of this world right."

This, of course, is where the cleansing of the temple comes in. John tells us, "When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and

cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, 'Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!' His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me'" (John 2:13-17). Jesus did not seek to eliminate temple worship. He sought to reform it. In other words, within the sphere of his influence he worked to transform what was into what it always should have been.

Such people are dangerous. They will either be loved or hated. In Christ's day most of the world turned from this all-demanding, revolutionary type of commitment. Pilate addressed them and asked, "Whom should I release to you? Jesus or Barabbas?" They answered, "Barabbas." Why should they have asked for Barabbas—Barabbas, the man who was going to burn their houses down and destroy the system? Tom Skinner, who tells this story in his book *Words of Revolution,* says: "It's very simple. If you let Barabbas go, and he starts another disturbance or another riot, you can always call out the National Guard, the Federal troops or the Marines to put his thing down. All you have to do is push a few tanks into his neighborhood and you can squash whatever he's up to. You can find out where he's keeping his guns and raid his apartment. You can always stop Barabbas. But the question is: *how do you stop Jesus?* How do you stop a Man who has no guns, no tanks, no ammunition, but still is shaking the whole Roman empire? How do you stop a Man, who—without firing a shot—is getting revolutionary results? They figured there's only one answer—get rid of Him....

"Barabbas would never really ask to run your life. Barabbas would exploit you, but he wouldn't ask to run your life. Jesus would ask to run your life. Jesus would ask for the right to rule over you! And that's the problem. Men would rather be enslaved to tyranny than let Jesus rule their lives. They would rather be exploited than let Christ determine their lives. So they said, 'Give us Barabbas.'"

The Call

It is the same today. Is Jesus Christ a revolutionary? No, he is not. He was executed wrongly on that count. And yet, like all revolutionary leaders, he demands the utmost of involvement, love, and self-sacrifice from his followers. Jesus did not offer a life of ease. Like Churchill, he offered men blood, tears, toil, and sweat. He told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). He demanded their all! There were few to follow him.

Will you dare to follow him? It is worth reflecting on who it was who first responded to his teaching. There were establishment figures as well as Zealots—that did not seem to matter—but there were few of the soft, well-heeled figures of southern Palestine. There were not many priests, not many rulers. The ones who followed him were the vigorous, rough-speaking fishermen types from Galilee. For they had the courage, and they were not afraid to be despised for being different. Have you that courage? Jesus will not ask you either to defend the status quo or to overthrow it. But he will give a new perspective. He will make you a new man or woman, capable of radical obedience within the bounds of true Christianity.

Chapter 28.
He Gave Them a Sign

John 2:18-22

Someone once asked a well-known Bible teacher what he considered to be his greatest spiritual need. The teacher replied that he was conscious of very many lacks in his life, but he believed that his greatest lack was knowing more of the Word of God so that he might know God better. When the person responded that he found this surprising, since the Bible teacher quite obviously spent most of his time studying the Bible, he was told in reply, "I know enough of the Bible to know how much more there is to know. And I know that all knowledge of God depends

upon such knowledge. Sometimes I feel like a man who has been running for a long distance—chest heaving, lungs pulling for more oxygen."

This reply was perceptive, of course, for it was an acknowledgment of one of the great underlying principles of Christianity. It is the principle that no one ever understands spiritual truths apart from the Bible and that, as a result, no one can come to know God by any other means.

Some persons think they can know God by means of their own human reason. But reason is a blind alley spiritually. It has always been the great minds exercising their powers apart from the Word of God who have produced the great heresies. Some think they can discover God by listening to a so-called "inner voice," but the voice is often nothing more than an expression of their own inner desires, as psychologists repeatedly point out. Quite a few think that spiritual truths can be verified by supernatural events or miracles. But the Bible everywhere teaches that even miracles will not lead men and women to understand and receive God's truth unless they themselves are illuminated by the Bible. Thus, Jesus said, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). I believe that we can state categorically that there is no knowledge of God apart from Jesus Christ and that there is no knowledge of Jesus Christ apart from a knowledge of the Bible.

Natural Wisdom

This truth is illustrated for us in the story to which we now come in our verse-by-verse study. Jesus had just performed a great sign by driving out of the temple in Jerusalem all those who were selling and bartering in the outer court of the Gentiles. This was a fulfillment of Psalm 69:9: "For zeal for your house consumes me." Nevertheless, in spite of the text and its fulfillment, those who were threatened by Christ's action were not thinking scripturally and consequently did not see the hand of God in Christ's action. They had already had one very dramatic sign. There was also a variety of unspecified miracles to be considered (John 2:23). But they rejected these things and instead demanded something

more. The Bible says the Jews demanded: "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" (v. 18).

What further sign could Christ give? There was only one, even though (because of their willingness to evaluate his ministry in the light of the Scriptures) they would eventually reject it also. Jesus therefore referred to his death and the resurrection that was to follow it, saying, "Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days" (v. 19). At this time no one understood Christ's saying. The rulers never understood it, and the disciples only began to understand it after the event and in the light of biblical revelation.

The reaction of the leaders of the Jews on this occasion is a great example of the attempts of men to understand spiritual things when they have not had their minds illuminated by Scripture. And the point is that such an attempt will always result in our seeing things only on the physical level.

Let me illustrate by this comparison. Several months ago on a trip that I was taking to the West Coast with my family I passed through one of the gambling towns in Nevada. If you have ever been to one of these towns yourself, you know that the most common sights in the gambling cities (with the exception of the neon lights) are the slot machines. They seem to be everywhere. The person playing the machine puts in his money, a quarter or a dollar coin—whatever it might be—and then pulls down a lever that is attached to the side. When he does this the wheels begin to spin with a whirring sound, and then they begin to stop one after the other and show various pictures. There is a standard and easily recognizable sound, first the whirring and then three clunks as the wheels stop turning. If certain combinations of pictures come up, the person playing the machine gets some money back. Most of the time nothing happens. Then, if the person is a gambler and a fool, he puts in more money. After the same sounds—whirr, clunk, clunk, clunk—nothing happens again.

This is exactly what took place when Jesus spoke words of spiritual truth. Take the third chapter of John. Nicodemus was a ruler of the

Jews, and he came to Jesus by night. He said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God." Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." That was a coin of spiritual truth being dropped into Nicodemus's slot. We take a breath, and we can almost hear the wheels begin to whirr as Nicodemus digests Christ's teaching. He answers, "How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" In other words, Jesus was speaking about the new life that a person receives by faith; and Nicodemus was saying to himself, "Human birth? Human birth? That means a father and a mother, conception, wombs, nine months of growth, babies, mother's milk." He came up with a blank.

We find the same thing repeated just one chapter later. In John 4 there is the account of Christ's meeting with the woman of Samaria. The two of them met at a well, so Jesus referred to wells and water in order to explain that he was offering to satisfy her spiritual thirst. The woman was unable to think on these terms. So the wheels went round, and she began to think, "Water? Water? Wells? The well is deep, water is heavy, it's a long way up the hill, this is a hot country, buckets, water jars—wouldn't it be nice if I didn't have to do this every day?" So she said out loud, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." As in the case of Nicodemus, there was a great whirring, but nothing clicked.

We must not think that this is the case only with the unchurched either, for at the end of the story in the same chapter we find that the same thing happened in a conversation between Christ and his disciples. During the time that Jesus had been talking to the woman, the disciples had been in the city buying food to eat. When they had returned and had urged him to take some of it, saying, "Rabbi, eat, "Jesus referred to his previous conversation with its blessing in the life of the woman, answering, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." What did the disciples do? They pulled down the lever and then asked one another, "Who brought him lunch?"

That is what happens when men and women confront spiritual truths with their own human ability. And it is exactly what happened in our story. Jesus referred to his resurrection, saying, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," and they did not have the wisdom to ask, "What are you referring to?" Instead, they assumed his remark to be an idiotic reference to the temple of Herod, and they therefore asked, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" (v. 20).

Roots of Unbelief

The first point I have made, then, is that no one understood what Jesus was saying when he first said it, because no one tried to understand it on the basis of biblical revelation. The second point is that the Jewish rulers (in spite of further miracles and signs) never did understand it. Why was this so? The answer to this question takes us a bit deeper into their attitude and into the reasons for disbelief generally.

We have already seen that the rulers had not been listening to the Bible, and because they had not been listening to the Bible they were not ready to listen to Jesus Christ either. In the Bible God speaks to men. But because they did not hear him there, neither did they hear him when he spoke to them face-to-face. The rulers were not really asking Jesus Christ for a sign. I know they asked, "What sign do you show us that you do these things?" But what they were really expressing was their anger at Christ's actions. They wanted to know what possible justification Jesus could give for having driven the money changers out of their temple, particularly when they had said that the money changers had a right to be there.

Men and women are like that with God today, even in our own world and in our churches. God speaks, but many do not really listen. One reason why they do not listen is that they are so wrapped up in their own outlook and their own way of doing things that they are privately angry with God for not conforming to their plans. Is that your attitude? If it is, then you must learn to forget your anger and instead learn to see

things from God's point of view. God's point of view— the only valid one—is revealed to us in Scripture.

Another reason why the rulers did not believe in Christ and did not approach things scripturally was that they did not want to hear what Jesus had to say. Why did Jesus refer to the temple being destroyed? Well, on one level he did so to provide a fresh illustration of his death and resurrection. But that is only one level. Isn't it also true that this illustration was meant to suggest the passing of the temple and the worship that was conducted there and to suggest that it would be replaced with a spiritual worship after his death and resurrection? Whatever the case, this is certainly what happened. The temple had been begun by Herod in about 20 B.C. It was now about a.d. 26, which meant that the temple had been in construction for forty-six years. It would be another thirty-seven years before the entire construction was finished—that is, about the year a.d. 63—and then seven years later the whole magnificent edifice would be destroyed by the Romans. The history of the temple is a great lesson in the futility of identifying buildings with true worship, and Christ's reference to it was a warning of the passing of traditional Judaism.

If there was anything these rulers did not want to hear, it was that. And since they were not ready to hear what Christ first had to say to them, they were not ready to listen to anything. Perhaps this is true of you also. When we listen to God he always begins by pointing out our need of himself. He shows us our sin and allows us to see a bit of our own rebellious heart. Perhaps you sense that he is doing that, or will do it; so you refuse to listen. You will not read the Bible or study it. If that is the case in your life, then you must learn that all good cures begin with an accurate diagnosis. And you must allow God to lead you from a recognition of your need to that which will satisfy it completely.

Do not think that this is something that only certain persons must experience. It is true for all, even theologians. One theologian, Professor John Baillie of the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, has written of his own experience with God: "What I now realize very clearly, and am ready to confess, is that much of the trouble in the days

when I could not hear God's voice was that I was not really listening. I was partly listening perhaps—giving, as it were, one ear to His commandments; but no promise is made in the Bible to those who partly listen, but only to those who hearken *diligently.* And why did I not thus hearken? It was that there were certain things I did not want to hear. We sometimes speak of people being 'conveniently deaf' to human communications, but there is such a thing also as being conveniently deaf towards God. ...There are certain things we just do not want to be told. They would be too inconvenient, too upsetting, too exacting. The readjustment they would involve would be too painful."

Finally, people will not believe in Christ because their minds are filled with the wrong ideas that we have all received from this world. Nearly all the ideas of this world are antithetical to those revealed in the Bible. So if we have our minds filled with the ideas of the world, as the Jewish rulers in this story did, we will not hear Jesus, and spiritual truths will seem foolish or incomprehensible to us. Instead of this we must allow God to transform us to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).

The Disciples

Let me suggest a final contrast before we end this study. Most of the story revolves around the rulers who did not want to hear and who did not approach the things of God scripturally. But they are not the only ones in the story. There are also the disciples. They were just a small group, mostly fishermen, men who were unlearned by the standards of that day. They had no reputation in the eyes of the world. They had no fame in Jerusalem. But they knew the Scriptures a little bit, and they had begun to interpret the things that were happening to them in the light of it.

Did you ever notice that this passage begins and ends with a reference to the Scriptures? The verses are 17 and 22, and they tell us that one of the acts of Christ they understood then as a result of knowing the Scripture and that another of Christ's acts they understood later as a

result of knowing the Scripture. It was all through the Scripture. We are told that after Jesus had cleansed the temple, his disciples thought about the Scriptures and "remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house has consumed me'" (v. 17). In other words, they were remembering Psalm 69:9 and were saying to themselves. "Yes, Jesus really is the Messiah, and he is fulfilling this Scripture." Later Jesus talked about destroying the temple and raising it up in three days. None of them understood it then; but we are told that as they learned to live in the Scriptures, as Jesus did, the time came when they looked back on the resurrection and understood it in terms of the Old Testament prophecies.

How does it stand with you? Do you approach things scripturally as God wants you to? Or are you still trying to puzzle out God's truth with your own weak faculties of reasoning? The Bible tells us that we will only advance spiritually and that we will only hear God's voice as we approach him through the pages of his book.

Chapter 29.
Christ and the Heart of Man

John 2:23-25

There is an old law of physics called Newton's Law that says that every action produces a reaction. It is always true in the physical realm and perhaps most always true in all of life. A person does something, and others react. A person says something, and something else happens.

This was true in the time of the Lord Jesus Christ. For instance, in the second chapter of John's Gospel there are three sets of actions by Jesus, each of which produced a distinct reaction. At the beginning of the chapter Jesus had turned water into wine at the marriage feast at Cana. Not many knew of this miracle, but we are told that the disciples who did know of it believed on him. This was the first reaction. A few days later Jesus drove the money changers from the temple in Jerusalem. This was a sign too. Nevertheless, the rulers of the people reacted to

him in anger, demanding, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" Finally, we are told that when he was at the feast he did further miracles with the result that many more "believed in his name."

Here were three levels of response to Jesus and his actions, ranging from the total disbelief of the leaders to the partially informed faith of the first disciples. We would say, "Well, some of the reactions were bad; some were better; some were quite good. Let's emulate the apostles." It is therefore somewhat of a shock to come to the end of the chapter and find, in spite of the obvious differences between these various groups of people that seem so significant to us, that the Lord Jesus Christ did not trust anyone. The text tells us, "But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man" (vv. 24-25). The Greek tells us quite literally that although many trusted in him, he did not trust in them; and the reason why he did not trust in them was that he knew what was in them.

The Heart of Man

What does God see when he looks into the heart of man? If we are to answer this question accurately, we must recognize first that only God can see into our hearts. Consequently, the picture he paints will naturally be different from what we might expect to find there.

We should not be surprised at our own inability to see into man's true nature, for this is demonstrated for us almost every day. Not so long ago I read about a man who had suddenly fled from this country with a large amount of money that was not his. It was from company funds. Up to that point he had been a trusted member of the firm. He had gained a certain amount of recognition for his work. He was well thought of by most of his coworkers and friends. He had a respected family. Yet he was a thief, and none of his family, friends, coworkers, or acquaintances had really known him.

The story could be repeated many times over, probably at least once or twice from your own experience. People cannot see into the minds of other people. Only God can do that. He "searches our hearts" (Rom. 8:27) and "knows the heart" (Acts 15:8). Consequently, we must not be surprised if his view of the hearts and minds of men differs from our own.

One of our great American short stories tells in a humorous way about a student taking a biology course in his first year at a university. The course was all right, but the student had a serious problem with the laboratory part of it. As part of his laboratory work he was supposed to draw the bacteria he saw through a microscope. Unfortunately, he was never able to see anything through his microscope. All he could ever see, the story tells us, was a white blur that looked like milk. In the same way, when we look into the human heart, apart from the magnification of the heart provided by the Word of God, all we see is the milk of human kindness, with perhaps a few small smudges of what the Bible calls sin. God has the heart of man in focus, with the result that he is never fooled by human goodness.

What, then, *does* God see when he looks into the heart of man? The answer is shocking to those who are not steeped in Scripture. The Bible tells us that according to God the heart is filled with madness, mischief, and evil. It is impenitent, darkened, gross, hard, proud, blind, filled with lust. It is far from God. God says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9). It is a grim picture, but it is only as we begin to see the heart as God sees it that we can begin to appreciate the greatness of God's love.

The Heart in History

At this point, however, we need to stop to look at the matter historically. Let me ask this question: What is the first great event in the Bible put there to reveal the heart of man to us? The answer is: the fall of Adam and Eve. What does it show? The answer is: It shows man in his state of rebellion against God, a rebellion in which he refuses to go God's way even if his own way kills him.

It is popular in our day to blame the fall of the race on the woman, just as Adam did when God came to him in the Garden. Adam said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (Gen. 3:12). We blame the woman, but this is not the way in which the Bible talks about it. The Bible tells us that Eve was deceived by the devil and so fell through error. But it also declares that when Adam sinned he did so, not through deceit or weakness but in willful rebellion against God. First Timothy 2:14 teaches this beyond any doubt, for it says "Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner."

Let me explain that a bit further. Suppose for a moment that Adam had sinned first and then the woman. And suppose that God had come to the couple in the Garden, saying, "What have you done?" If that had been the case, the women could have answered, "I have just been doing what you told me to do. You gave me the man to be the head of our home. So when he ate of the tree, I obeyed him and did it also." That is what the woman could have said if Adam had sinned first, and the fall of the race would have been incomplete. However, Adam did not sin first. The woman sinned first, and so, "the woman ... became a sinner."

But now, if the woman was deceived, this was obviously not so with the man. Adam knew what he was doing. Consequently, his guilt was greater. God had placed Adam in the Garden as lord under himself of all creation. There were trees in the Garden; and God had said to Adam, "I want you to feel free to eat of all the trees north of here, south of here, east of here, and west of here. But as a symbol of your dependence upon me I am marking this one tree—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—as a tree from which you shall not eat. Moreover, so you will know that I mean business, I am warning you that in the day in which you eat of it you will surely die." Adam looked at the tree and then said, in effect, "I do not care if you have given me all the trees north of here, south of here, east of here, and west of here. So long as that tree remains in the Garden as a symbol of my dependence upon you I will hate it." So he ate of the tree and died—first, spiritually and then, later, in soul and body also.

The fall of man is what would be called in theology a *de novo* act, an act that was entirely new, that had no connection with anything that had gone before it. It was essentially a rebellion. Man had said, "I am the captain of my soul; I am the master of my fate; I hate anything that opposes me, even God." So man sinned, and his rebellion passed upon the race.

We are like Adam, and our children are also. Suppose your child is sitting at the table in a bad mood and you say to him, "Come on now, Johnny, sit up and eat your dinner." Instead, Johnny folds his arms and sort of spits to show his feelings about what you are trying to get him to do. You say it a second time, "Come on, Johnny, you have to eat if you're going to grow up to be a big, strong boy." He reaches his hand toward his dish, grabs a spoon, and then begins to wave the spoon around. Finally he knocks his milk over. In other words, he does anything but what you want him to do and thereby illustrates how Adam's rebellion has passed through us to our children.

Spiritual wisdom comes at the point at which we will accept God's description of our nature and ask him to lead us into ways that can please him.

Sinai

Let me take you to another biblical event that reveals the hearts of men as God sees them. Much later, after God had begun to establish a race through whom he was going to send the Redeemer, God delivered the race from Egypt, bringing them into the desert to the foot of Mount Sinai. God had delivered Israel through what is probably the greatest collection of miracles in all history. He had brought them to Sinai in order that he might give them the law. The Bible says that God descended upon the mountain in the midst of a cloud of smoke and fire. So awe-inspiring was the sight that even Moses said, "I am trembling with fear" (Heb. 12:21).

As the hours turned to days and the days to weeks, however, the people who were left in the valley gradually overcame their fear of the

mountain and began to forget the power of God and the miracles. They grew cynical and impatient. They said, "Where is Moses, who brought us up out of Egypt? We don't know what has become of him." Before long they began to remember the worship of Apis the bull and Hathor the cow that they had known in Egypt, and they approached Moses' brother Aaron to ask him to make an image of Apis or Hathor for them. Aaron should have refused immediately and indignantly. But Aaron was weak, like many Christians. He reminded himself that politics is the art of the possible. So he took their gold, melted it in the fire, and when he was done he had enough of the metal to make a little calf. That satisfied the people. So they began to sing and dance and worship the calf, saying, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (Exod. 32:4).

Meanwhile, up on the mountain God was still speaking to Moses, giving him the law. How ironic it was, the contrast between the law and the behavior of the people! God was saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exod. 20:2-6). But while God was saying this the people turned their backs on the One who had delivered them from Egypt.

Look to the Cross

Pass over the centuries to the time of Jesus Christ and then try to find an excuse for man's behavior. Someone might argue that the doctrine of man's sinfulness is abstract and that we only understand the concrete. He might say, "If only we had an example of what true goodness and obedience are, then we would all acknowledge the right and follow it." But would we? Not at all! Jesus came. He was the perfect example. He

said to his enemies on one occasion, "Which of you convicts me of sin?" There was absolute silence. No one had anything with which to charge him. Yet it was these same men who mocked him, taunted him, and finally delivered him over to the Romans to be crucified.

That is the heart of man. That is what Jesus saw. It is how God sees you and me today. And yet—this is the wonderful thing—God loves you in spite of your sin and has proved it by letting Christ die for you.

It is not hard to love someone who is lovely. We all do that. It is often possible to love someone who is unlovely. Some do that occasionally. But to love someone who is rebellious, proud, arrogant, corrupt, ruthlessly independent, and who will crucify the very one who most loves him—that is real love! Of that sort of love only God is capable.

If you really desire to know the extent of God's love, look to the cross. You see Christ hanging there. You watch the hours of darkness descend on the land, the hours in which Christ was made sin for you and bore your punishment. You hear his cry, wrung from him in the moments in which he was separated from God as your sin-bearer: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" That is how much God loves you. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

We live in a miserable, vascillating age. It is almost impossible for me to relate how many people I have heard say to me in one form or another: "Nobody loves me." It is often true. It may be true for you. It may be true that no one really understands you, that you are unloved by your parents, your children, your acquaintances. Yet there is One who does understand you—Jesus Christ. He knows everything about you. He sees your heart, and he loves you anyway.

Chapter 30.
The Man Who Came by Night

John 3:1

Quite a few years ago Governor Neff, of the state of Texas, received an invitation to speak at one of the penitentiaries in that state. He spoke to the assembled prisoners, and afterward said that he would be around for a while to listen to anything any of the convicts might wish to tell him. He would take as much time as they wanted, and anything they would tell him would be kept in confidence. The convicts began to come, one at a time. One after another told him a story of how they had been unjustly sentenced, were innocent, and wished to get out. Finally one man came through who said to him, "Governor Neff, I don't want to take much of your time. I only want to say that I really did what they convicted me for. But I have been here a number of years. I believe I have paid my debt to society and that, if I were to be released, I would be able to live an upright life and show myself worthy of your mercy." This was the man whom Governor Neff pardoned.

I know, of course, that there are imperfections in that illustration. For one thing, some of the men who claimed to be innocent might actually have been innocent. For another, the man who was pardoned might have been deceiving the governor and might have led a much more disreputable life after his release. Still, the point of the story stands: the first step in the rehabilitation of any man lies in his admission of guilt. To benefit from a doctor, the patient must admit that he is sick.

Just as this is true in medicine, business, and criminal rehabilitation, so is it true spiritually. Therefore, much of the Word of God is given over to revealing man's need so that a person might acknowledge his need and turn to God for pardon.

A Representative Man

This pattern of the biblical revelation is found in John's Gospel. Our studies of the Gospel thus far have taken us through the first two chapters of the book, with the result that we come now to the record of the two-thousand-year-old conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus, contained in chapter 3. This chapter stresses the need for the new birth

and for faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but before it does this it first of all stresses man's *need* for these. Therefore, we must first see Nicodemus as a representative of all men standing as sinners before God.

The first two chapters of the Gospel have been concerned with the person of Jesus primarily, but it is also true that they have been concerned with man. In the first chapter, John pointed out that when the true Light shone in the world, men as a whole did not respond to him (vv. 10-11). In chapter 2, John tells us that although many seemed to believe in Jesus as a result of his miracles, nevertheless "Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men" (v. 24). The failure of men in spiritual things is now John's theme, and Nicodemus is to be seen as his first concrete example.

This is much more apparent in the Greek text of the Gospel than it is in the English. Still, it can also be seen in the English so long as we remember that the chapter and verse divisions of our Bibles were not in the original text. With these eliminated we can easily see that when John begins to say in 3:1, "Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council." He is deliberately repeating the word "man" which occurs in the previous chapter. There we are told that Jesus knew what was in *man* and therefore did not commit himself to *man*. Nicodemus is a man. Consequently, we must begin with the recognition that he is introduced above all as a representative of the human race.

A Pharisee

He is a good representative too, at least from a human point of view. For if we had lived in Christ's day and had been forced for some reason to choose a man to represent us, a man who would embody the best of our culture, education, ethics, and piety, Nicodemus would have been a good choice. We would not have chosen the emperor or many of the rulers of Rome, for these men were demonstrably corrupt. We would not have chosen the philosophers of Greece, for they had little knowledge of religion. We would not have chosen a common, ignorant person. But we would have chosen Nicodemus. Nicodemus had

everything. And yet—this is the point of John's account—he was a failure spiritually because he had never found God.

Notice his achievements. First of all, Nicodemus was a *Pharisee.* In our day we have a bad picture of the Pharisees, primarily because of the harsh words Jesus spoke about them. In our minds the word "Pharisee" is almost a synonym for hypocrite. It suggests ritualistic religion. In Jesus' time the religion of Judaism was largely an ethical cult, and the Pharisees were the chief exponents of the ethical way of life. All this is true. Yet in other ways the Pharisees were probably the best people in the whole country. To begin with, there were never really very many of them. William Barclay notes that there were never more than six thousand Pharisees, and that because of their limited number they actually formed a kind of select brotherhood. Moreover, they were serious about the law. The Pharisees were the theological conservatives of their day. They believed that the Old Testament was the revealed Word of God and that the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, contained an inspired code of ethics to be believed and practiced literally. In some ways the greatest glory of the Pharisaic religion lay in the fact that it applied the law literally. It was the goal of the scribes to work out the exact meaning of the law; it was the determined purpose of the Pharisees to keep it.

As a Pharisee, Nicodemus represented those of his day and ours who seek the meaning of life in religion but do not find it. He belonged to the church, but he knew nothing of that personal, lifetransforming relationship to Jesus Christ upon whom the true church is founded.

Second, Nicodemus was a *scholar.* This is perfectly evident from the fact that he was a Pharisee, for the Pharisees were great students of the law. Yet it is evident in another way also.

Have you ever noticed the fact that although Nicodemus was a Jew he nevertheless had a Greek name? Nicodemus is Greek for "one who conquers the people." This might not mean much in America where we have a great mixture of races and cultures, where a man might as well be called Karl, James, Joseph, or Pierre and have it mean little

concerning him. But in Palestine, in the first Christian century, it was significant. For the most part those who lived in Judea had Hebrew or Aramaic names. However, those in the upper classes, who were exposed to Greek as well as Jewish culture, often gave their children two names, a Greek name as well as a Hebrew one. Evidently this had been true of Nicodemus, which indicates that he had a Greek education. Moreover, since he apparently preferred to be known by his Greek rather than his Hebrew name, Nicodemus probably had a preference for Greek over Hebrew culture and may actually have been a Hellenist, that is, one who read the Old Testament in Greek and who looked at it in the light of the categories of Greek philosophy. It was therefore a highly educated man as well as a highly moral and ethical man who came to Jesus in the warmth of that Judean night.

Isn't it true that he is a representative of many highly educated people in our day? We have been told by many in our century that education is the means to solve the world's problems. As a result we have the most highly educated mass of people in our country and in the world that this race has ever seen. It seems that a man needs a high school education just to wash dishes. Still the problems are not solved, and the unrest that characterizes our day is as evident on the campuses as in the ghettos. If the example of Nicodemus is to teach anything, it is to teach that education is not the answer to man's spiritual unrest and longing.

Third, Nicodemus was a *politician.* John says in writing about him that he was "a member of the Jewish ruling council." That means that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the highest legislative body in Judaism, combining in itself all the powers that we generally divide up among the legislative, administrative, and judicial branches of our governments. Naturally, under Roman rule the powers of the Sanhedrin were more restricted than they had once been. There were times when the members of the Sanhedrin were unable to inflict the death penalty, as for instance, at the trial of Jesus. Still the Sanhedrin was the chief authority in Israel. It conducted trials, investigated heresies, wrote laws, and carried on most of the official

dealings between the people of Judea and the Roman authorities. Nicodemus was a member of this exclusive, governing body.

It is part of the same picture that Nicodemus may also have been among one of the most distinguished families in Judea, even when measured by the standards of this elite body of politicians. The basis for this supposition lies in the fact that Josephus, in his *Antiquities*, twice mentions a high-ranking Jewish family in which the name Nicodemus is prominent. He tells us that nearly one hundred years before the conversation recorded here, when Aristobulus, the Jewish ruler, needed an ambassador to the court of Pompey, the Roman emperor, he chose a man named Nicodemus to bear his message. He also writes that after this time, during the Jewish war of a.d. 66-70, a man named Gorion was given the responsibility of negotiating the surrender of the garrison at Jerusalem and that he was the son of a certain Nicodemus (or Nicomedus) who would therefore have lived in Christ's generation. If these facts are significant, it may mean not only that Nicodemus was an extremely pious person, not only highly educated, not only a politician, but also that he came from one of the most distinguished and best-known families in the entire nation.

He would have been even more important than a Rockefeller, Astor, Stevenson, Einstein, or Eisenhower. For in one sense he was all these things in one.

Isn't this the kind of man you would choose to represent you? Or the kind of man you might like to be? Of course, he is. Yet the point of his story, the reason why John records Nicodemus's conversation with Jesus, is that in spite of his achievements, in spite of his prominence in education, politics, culture, and religion, Nicodemus had a great need. He needed to know God. Because he did not know God he was psychologically ill at ease, unhappy, lost, and spiritually blind.

Rebirth

A person might ask quite rightly how these things can be so. How can a man who has achieved everything from a human point of view still be unhappy? How can the achievers of this world be lost? The answer comes out in the story. For the first point that Jesus made in speaking with Nicodemus is that all men need a new birth. Jesus said, "Of course you don't have the solutions to life, Nicodemus; for the solutions to life are spiritual and no man can see them unless he has come to life spiritually." His actual words were: "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (v. 3).

According to Jesus, the starting point in the Christian life is rebirth. Before his new birth a man is a child of wrath. He is alienated from God, as Nicodemus was, and he has no real understanding of spiritual things. God comes to him to plant saving faith within his heart, for we are told that even faith does not come from ourselves; it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). Then God brings the words of Scripture to our attention. Finally, the Holy Spirit takes the words of Scripture and plants them within the womb of our heart with the result that life is conceived. Hereafter the man can declare, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17 RSV). It is true that the man still retains much of his old nature, but now he begins to see things differently and the life within begins to grow.

The full meaning of the new birth will become more evident as the chapter goes on, but this study should not end without providing an example of the kind of change the new birth can produce. Nicodemus will not do for an example, for we are never told how he responded to this teaching by Jesus. So far as we know he never understood it and never believed. Still there is another excellent example of a man who did.

This man was a rabbi, just like Nicodemus. He came from a good family and was versed in Greek as well as Hebrew culture, just like Nicodemus. This man had studied with the best men of his day. He was a Pharisee, like Nicodemus. He was even (in one sense) a politician, for

he was associated with the Sanhedrin. He put down sectarian groups that threatened his brand of Judaism. Still there came a time, as this learned rabbi was on the way to Damascus with an assignment to ferret out and imprison the Christians of that city, when he met Jesus Christ and received new life from him.

Afterward he wrote about it, saying that all his achievements, like those of Nicodemus, had really proved worthless. In fact, they were worse than worthless—they were actually harmful— for they had kept him from true saving faith in God's Son. He wrote: "If anyone thinks to base his claims on externals, I could make a stronger case for myself: circumcised on my eighth day, Israelite by race, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born and bred; in my attitude to the law, a Pharisee; in pious zeal, a persecutor of the church; in legal rectitude, faultless. But all such assets I have written off because of Christ. I would say more: I count everything sheer loss, because all is far outweighed by the gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I did in fact lose everything" (Phil. 3:4-8 NEB).

This was the experience of the apostle Paul. It is recorded in the Book of Philippians. Is this your experience? Is this your life? Or are you still trying to discover a life of contentment and blessing through your own limited achievements and human understanding? It will not come through your own efforts. It will only come through the new birth found and expressed by faith in the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 31.
Intellectuals or New Men?

John 3:2

The longer I live the more convinced I become that the natural man will do almost anything to dodge the full implications of the gospel. The gospel declares that Jesus Christ died to save men, but when this is proclaimed the non-Christian immediately begins to think of all the

other meanings Christ's death might have, and so avoid the right one. The gospel states that Jesus Christ is the sole way to God. The one who has not yet come to Christ begins to advance other ways of salvation and to argue in defense of the many non-Christian religions. In the same way, whenever the Bible speaks of man's total inability to please God, many will immediately reject that and seek for exceptions.

This aspect of human nature is known to God, of course. Thus, much of the Bible is given over to declaring the full scope of man's need. In fact, this is one of the two greatest themes of the Bible. The first is the utter inability of man to save himself. The second is the way of salvation provided by God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In an indirect way, the extent of man's need is seen in the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus that is recorded in John 3. The first verse has shown man's need in reference to the many external accomplishments of which a talented man is capable. Nicodemus was a well-educated, earnest, even a pious politician, but none of these achievements could save him. He was lost and lonely. He needed to be born again. It is possible, however, that some might read the account and agree—up to this point. "And yet," they might say, "what about the extent of man's knowledge? Man's greatest strength is in his mind. Can't a man find true happiness and peace with God through his intellect?" It is in answer to this type of argument that the story now goes on to show that even man's intellect is inadequate when applied to spiritual things.

The Fall

To understand why man's mind is an inadequate tool for coming to know God, we need to go back to the story of the fall of man as recorded in the Book of Genesis.

To begin with, the Bible says that when God created man he created him in his own image. This means many things, but among them is the fact that since God is a trinity, man became a trinity also. God exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Man also became a trinity when God created him with a body, soul, and spirit. Everyone knows

what the body is: that part of man that we can see. Man shares with the plant world the fact that he has a body. In addition to a body, man also possesses a soul. A soul is that part of man that gives him his identity. It is with the soul that man thinks, feels, reacts, and aspires. A man is linked to the animal world by his soul, for the animals also have a sense of identity. That is why Jesus said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests." That is, they know who they are, and they return to that which is theirs.

In addition to a body and a soul, however, a man also possesses a spirit, or (as we should probably say for all men since the fall) he possesses the capacity for one. It is this capacity that sets man apart from the animal world. The spirit is that part of man that has consciousness of God. Consequently, man worships, while the animals do not.

This was the man that God placed in the Garden, a man with a body, soul, and spirit. God said to him, "The whole earth is for your enjoyment. You can eat of all the trees in the garden, but as a symbol of your dependence upon me I am marking out one tree, the fruit of which you shall not eat. This is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the day that you eat of this tree you will die." Adam looked at the tree. Then, after a suitable pause, he ate of it, thereby saying to God, "I do not care for all the trees north of here, east of here, south of here, or west of here. As long as this tree stands in the middle of the Garden it reminds me of my dependence upon you, and I hate it. I will therefore eat of it and die."

What happened when Adam ate of the forbidden fruit? He died, of course. But how did he die? Well, he did not die physically at first. That came later. First, his spirit died. That was the part of his being that had communion with God. Consequently, the communion was broken, and man proved that it was broken by running away from God when God came to him in the Garden.

Second, man began to die in his soul. Since the soul is the seat of man's intellect, feelings, and identity, man therefore began to lose his identity, give vent to bad feelings, and suffer the decay of his intellect. This is

the type of intellectual and spiritual decay portrayed in the first chapter of Romans where we are told that having given up the worship of the true God, people's "thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles" (Rom. 1:21-23).

We must not take this to mean that man lost his ability to reason. That is not true. It simply means that man lost his ability to reason his way to God. An illustration may help us here. There is a condition in the human body, known to doctors as *myasthenia gravis*, in which the muscles of the body cannot respond to the signals being sent from the brain. In the human body the brain normally originates the signal for a muscle to expand or contract. The signal is sent to the muscle through a nerve and is received in the muscle by an apparatus known as the motor-end-plate. In the condition I mentioned, the motor-end-plates are missing. Consequently, the signal is sent to the muscle through the nerves, but it is never received by the muscle. Because it is not received, the muscle does not respond, and because the muscle does not respond it eventually withers away and dies.

That is exactly what happened in man when his spirit died through the fall. In the human system the spirit was meant to play the part of the motor-end-plate. It was meant to receive God's signals. When Adam and Eve sinned, the motor-end-plate died. Thus, although the signals are still there, although God is speaking, people do not hear him and their spiritual life withers. Eventually, of course, even the human body dies. So it is written, "Dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:19).

It is possible to describe salvation completely in reference to these three parts of man's being. Man sinned, and man died—body, soul, and spirit. So when God begins to save a man he begins to work with his body, soul, and spirit, only in reverse order. The salvation of the spirit comes first. This is justification; by it man receives a new spirit. The salvation of the soul is second. This is sanctification; in sanctification man receives a new soul (for God does not merely patch up the old one). The

salvation of the body comes last. This is the resurrection in which man receives a new body.

Running from God

In our studies we are going to deal with this great plan of salvation. But first we need to see two major results of what I have been saying.

The first result is that man no longer seeks God. In fact, man runs from God. He does this in religious ways as well as in secular ones. God is good. Man is sinful. If man's intellect were functioning properly, the intellect should tell him that all truth, joy, growth, and happiness is to be found in fellowship with his Creator. But when man fell his mind began to be warped in regard to spiritual things so that now he thinks happiness is to be found in independence. God comes with the offer of salvation and renewed fellowship, and man says, "No, not that. Anything but that." And he runs away.

I know that someone will ask, "What do you mean when you say that man runs away from God? I *sought* God. In fact, I am still seeking him. I sought God in the Presbyterian church, and when I couldn't find God in the Presbyterian church I left it and became a Baptist. When I couldn't find God in the Baptist church I left that church and became a Methodist. Now I am a Pentecostal, and if I don't find God in the Pentecostal church I am going to leave the church and become a Mormon." You have not been seeking God; you have been running away from him! When God got close to you in the Presbyterian church and said, "My child, this is the truth about your condition and your need for a Savior," you turned from him, saying, "I don't like that way of talking about religion; I'm going to go elsewhere." You went to the Baptist church. But when God got close to you in the Baptist church you became a Methodist. Now you are a Pentecostal. The truth is that you are not seeking God; you are running away from him.

Some time ago a minister told me a story that illustrates this truth. He had come in the early days of his ministry to a very liberal church. His prayer in those days—because he knew that many would be offended

with the true gospel—was, "Lord, just let them leave quietly." And, of course, many did—before the church began to grow to its present size. The day came when one woman, who had been his greatest supporter at the beginning, walked out very much offended. As she did, she stopped to tell him, "Sir, I am leaving this church and I will not be back. No man is going to call me a miserable sinner!" Such is the heart of our fallen race.

The second result of the fall, as it affects man's reason, is that he now needs revelation if he is to know anything at all about God. In other words, not only does he not come to God by reason; it is also true that he is incapable of coming. Thus, we find Paul writing: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:9-10). This means that a person will never understand spiritual truth unless God first takes the initiative in saving him.

Nicodemus

All that goes before is really a theological introduction to the second verse of John 3. So I now want to illustrate it by John's story.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (v. 2). Apart from the word "Rabbi," which was his direct form of address, the first words that Nicodemus uttered were his claim to considerable intellectual knowledge. He said, "We know." He then began to rehearse three things that he knew: (1) that Jesus was continuing to do many miracles; (2) that the miracles were intended to authenticate him as a teacher sent from God; and, therefore, (3) that Jesus was a teacher sent from God to whom Nicodemus should listen. Unfortunately for Nicodemus, the point of the story is that Nicodemus's whole conception of Jesus Christ was wrong in spite of his knowledge. His intellect had deceived him. That is why Jesus rebuked him by saying, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (v. 3). There had been hundreds of teachers sent from God during the long

course of Jewish history. Many of them had been authenticated by miracles. But Jesus was not one of these teachers. They were men. Jesus Christ was God. They had come to teach about God. He was God come to teach, die, and reveal himself to men.

The second way in which Nicodemus illustrates the results of the fall on the human intellect is that he reacted to Christ's words in purely natural terms. We referred to this when considering John 2:18-22. Jesus replied to Nicodemus's words by saying that a man must be born again before he can understand things spiritually. This was simple spiritual teaching, but it was a mystery to Nicodemus. Jesus was speaking of the need for new, spiritual life. But all Nicodemus could think of was obstetrics. Jesus had said, "You must be born again." Nicodemus began to think of all the concepts that could possibly be associated with the only kind of birth he knew— physical birth. Then when that didn't make sense he asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" (v. 4).

Jesus answered, in effect. "No, Nicodemus, I don't mean obstetrics. I am speaking of the kind of birth that takes place by means of God's Spirit."

A Comprehensive Cure

That brings us to the cure that God has for man's intellect. The cure begins with man's spirit, for it is there that the communion with God was broken. The new birth means that God has restored communication. Before the new birth the motor-end-plates were missing. Now they are restored, and man begins to receive and understand what God is saying.

We must not think, however, that the salvation of man stops there. For since the fall affected man's mind, so does salvation affect it. Only salvation affects it positively. Think how many verses speak of the transformation that God wills for man's mind after his conversion. In some ways Romans 12:1-2 is the touchstone: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of

worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and per-feet will." Isaiah speaks of the mind also, for he writes: "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast" (Isa. 26:3). Peter wrote: "Prepare your minds for action" (1 Peter 1:13). Finally, perhaps the greatest verse in the New Testament about the task of reordering our minds is the place where Paul writes, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).

This is the task that is set before you in this life, if you are a Christian. This is why you must study the Bible and expose yourself to sound teaching. It must always stand as a great biblical principle that God does not save men by means of the human intellect. He wants new men. But let it also be said that he wishes to train the thoughts and order the intellect of the new men.

Chapter 32.
Becoming New Men

John 3:3-5

A young Arab was proceeding down the road on a donkey when he came upon a small bird, a sparrow, lying upon his back in the road. There he was, a small scrawny object with two thin legs pointed skyward. At first the Arab thought the sparrow was dead. When he found that the bird was alive, however, the Arab got down from his donkey and went forward to speak to him. "Are you all right?" he asked.

"Yes," the sparrow answered.

"Then what are you doing lying on your back with your legs pointed up at the sky?"

"Haven't you heard the rumor?" the sparrow asked in return. "They say that heaven is going to fall."

"If it does," said the Arab, "surely you don't think you're going to hold it up with those two scrawny legs?"

The bird looked at him with a solemn face for a moment and then retorted, "One does the best one can."

We laugh at the story, of course, but the folly of the sparrow is only an illustration of the folly of human beings who think they can hold off the wrath of divine judgment by the scrawny legs of human achievements. According to the Bible, this cannot be done. Thus, the first few verses of John 3 have been showing that no man can please God either by his own achievements or by his intellect. Instead a man must be born again. At this point, however, Nicodemus asks the question that anyone might quite properly ask, "All right, you say that a man must be born again. How, then, is it possible? How *can* a man be born again?" To this question—perhaps the most important question that anyone can ask—the third chapter of John gives two answers.

Birth from Above

The first answer to Nicodemus's question is the answer Jesus gave even before he asked it. Jesus said, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (v. 3). Later he said the same thing by repeating, "You must be born again" (v. 7). The answer involved in this statement lies in the meaning of the Greek word translated "again." It is one of two Greek words that are often translated "again" in our Bibles. One is *palin*, which refers quite simply to the repetition of an act. The other word, the one used here, is *anothen*, which also refers to the repetition of an act but which implies more.

In the first place, *anothen* can also be translated "from above." This is the meaning of the word in John 3:31 that says, "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all." "Above" points to heaven. So when the Bible uses

anothen instead of *palin* in the first part of the chapter, it is suggesting that the new birth is supernatural and has its origin in God.

Then, too, there is an even finer distinction that also bears this out. *Palin*, as I have said, refers to the repetition of an act. *Anothen* also refers to the repetition of an act, but it involves one additional detail, the fact that the repetition of the act has the same source as the first act. Suppose that the pianist Van Cliburn and I are in a room and that Van Cliburn has just completed playing the piano parts of Tchaikovsky's great piano concerto. People want to hear it again. Now if they were Greek and should say, "Play it again (*palin*)," that would mean that I could sit down at the piano and try and do it. It would only mean that they wanted to hear the music repeated. However, if they should say, "Play it again (*anothen*)," it would mean that the repetition of the music would have to have the same source as the first playing. In other words, Van Cliburn would have to play the concerto. Thus, when Jesus said, "Unless he is born again," he was suggesting that the new birth would have to have the same source as the original birth. That is, Nicodemus would have to be brought to life spiritually by God.

This distinction takes us back to the early chapters of Genesis, before the fall, where we are told that "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen. 2:7). When Adam sinned he lost God's life, first spiritually and then physically. Thus, Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed to be born again as Adam was born. God was the source. Therefore, Nicodemus needed to have a fresh impartation of spiritual life; there had to be a new creation.

Water and Wind

The second answer to Nicodemus's question—"How can a man be born again?"—is the answer given in verse 5. Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (RSV). This verse carries Jesus' explanation of the new birth a bit further, for having explained it in reference to its source he now begins to explain in a more technical way how the new birth

takes place. It takes place literally by "water" and "breath" or, as most translations say, "of water and of the Spirit." In other words, Jesus first spoke of the source of the new birth. He now speaks of the means by which it occurs.

At this point we must acknowledge that several interpretations of the phrase "of water and of the Spirit" have been given. One of these interpretations takes the word "water" as referring to physical birth. I heard this explanation first during my years in college. It is based on the fact that physical birth is accompanied by the release of the embryonic fluid from the womb of the mother. If this were the proper explanation, Jesus would be saying that in order for a person to be saved he must first be born physically and then his physical birth must be followed by a spiritual birth.

True as this may be, it does not seem to be the proper interpretation of the statement. For one thing, the word "water" is never used in this way elsewhere in Scripture. For another, a reference to the necessity of physical birth is so self-evident that the question arises whether Jesus would waste words in this fashion. The third and decisive problem with this view is that since Jesus was probably claiming that a person is born again by water as well as by the Spirit, if water refers to physical birth, this is simply not true. Physical birth is not part of the answer.

The second interpretation of the phrase is that which sees water as referring to water baptism. Unfortunately, this is not substantiated either by the text or by biblical theology. The text says nothing at all about baptism, and the Bible elsewhere teaches that no one is saved by any external rite of religion (1 Sam. 16:7; Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 2:15, 16; 5:1-6). Baptism is a sign of what has already taken place, but it is not the agent by which it takes place.

Some years ago a young woman came to me wanting to be married to a young man whom I had not yet met. I arranged for us to get together and in the course of the resulting conversation discovered that neither the young woman nor the young man were Christians. The man was quite open about it and regarded the church service as merely a public

ceremony. The young woman thought she was a Christian, largely because she had come from a family of churchgoers and had been baptized in her infancy by a bishop. When I pointed out that baptism never made anyone a Christian this woman was greatly offended. She was even more offended when later I declined to perform the ceremony.

Someone will object to this on the grounds that John the Baptist supposedly baptized people for new life, but this is wrong teaching. John called for repentance, and when men or women repented he baptized them as a sign to others that this had happened. The proof of this is seen in the fact that John actually refused to baptize certain of the Pharisees and Sadducees because they did not show evidence of any genuine change in their lives.

The third interpretation of the phrase "of water and of the Spirit" is one that takes both parts of the phrase symbolically. "Water," the argument goes, refers to cleansing; "Spirit" refers to power. Therefore, one must be both cleansed and filled with power. William Barclay is one who holds this view. It is true, of course, that the sinner must be cleansed from his sin and that it is the Christian's privilege to be endued with power from on high, but it is questionable whether this is the primary meaning of this passage. Strictly speaking, both cleansing and power accompany the new birth, while these verses are dealing with the way in which the new birth itself comes about. Moreover, neither of the ideas is related at all to the birth metaphor as the context seems to require.

One of the great students of the Greek New Testament, Kenneth S. Wuest, proposed a fourth explanation. It is based upon the use of the word "water" as a metaphor in other New Testament texts. Wuest points out that "water" often is used in Scripture to refer to the Holy Spirit. He thinks that this is the case in John 4, for instance, where Jesus tells the woman of Samaria that he will give her "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). Another case is John 7:3738, where almost the identical language is used. After this statement John himself adds, as if in parentheses, "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive" (v. 39). Wuest also refers to Isaiah 44:3

and 55:1, both of which should have been known to Nicodemus. If this is the correct interpretation of the phrase "of water and of the Spirit," then we have a repetition of ideas, and the word "and" should be taken in its emphatic sense. We would normally indicate this by translating the word as "even." Thus, Jesus would be saying, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water, even the Spirit."

The explanation given by Wuest is a good explanation. Nevertheless, it seems to me that another must be preferred. Wuest begins by pointing out that the word "water" is often a metaphor for the Holy Spirit. This is true, but it is not the only spiritual reality that is suggested by that metaphor.

Water is also a metaphor for the written Word of God, the Bible. Thus, Ephesians 5:26 says that Christ gave himself for the church "to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word." In 1 John the same author who composed the fourth Gospel distinguishes between the witnesses to Christ on earth of "the Spirit, the water and the blood" (1 John 5:8). Since he then goes on to speak of God's written witness to the fact that salvation is in Christ, in this context the Spirit must refer to God's witness within the individual, the blood to the historical witness of Christ's death, and the water to the Scriptures. Psalm 119:9 declares, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. "Jesus said, "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you" (John 15:3).

A related text is James 1:18, which actually cites the Scriptures as the channel through which the new birth takes place, although without using water as the metaphor. "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."

When we see Christ's words in this light, we see that God is here pictured as the Divine Begetter, the Father of his spiritual children, and we learn that the written Word of God together with the working of his Holy Spirit is the means by which the new birth is accomplished. That is why the Bible tells us that it pleased God to save people by the

foolishness of preaching, for people are reborn through the efforts of others who proclaim God's Word (Rom. 10:14-15; 1 Cor. 1:21).

Spiritual Conception

One more verse makes this even clearer: 1 Peter 1:23. It says, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God."

There are many symbols for the Word of God in the Bible. We are told that the Bible is "a lamp" to our feet and "a light" to our path (Ps. 119:105). The Word is like "a fire ... and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces" (Jer. 23:29). It is "milk" to the spiritual infant and "strong meat" to those of a more mature age (1 Peter 2:2; Heb. 5:11-14). It is a sword (Heb. 4:12; Eph. 6:17), a "mirror" (1 Cor. 13:12; 2 Cor. 3:18; James 1:23), a "schoolmaster to bring us to Christ" (Gal. 3:24). It is a branch grafted into our bodies (James 1:21). These are great images, but none is so bold as the one used by Peter in this passage.

In the first chapter of 1 Peter, Peter has been talking about the means by which a person enters the family of God. First, he has discussed his theme *objectively* in terms of Christ's death, writing that "it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed ... but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (vv. 18, 19). Second, he has discussed the basis of the new birth *subjectively,* pointing out that it occurs through faith: "Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God" (v. 21). Finally, having mentioned these truths, Peter goes on to discuss the new birth in terms of God's sovereign grace in *election.* This time, however, he emphasizes that God is the Father of his children and that we are born again spiritually by means of the Word of God, which Peter likens to the male life germ. The Latin Vulgate makes this image of Peter's even clearer than our English versions, for the word used there is *semen*.

When we take these passages together and then add to them all that the Bible has to say about faith and about the work of the Holy Spirit in

salvation, we find that we are able to grasp the essential nature of the new birth in terms of human conception. What happens when a man or a woman is born again? The answer is that God first of all plants within the heart of the person what we might call the ovum of saving faith, for we are told that even faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). Second, God sends forth the seed of his Word so that the seed of the Word, which contains the divine life within it, pierces the ovum of faith that God has already placed within our hearts. The result is conception. By this means, a new spiritual life comes into being, a life that has its origin in God and that therefore has no connection whatever with the sinful life that surrounds it.

God did not use anything of Abram when he made Abraham. He did not use anything of Simon when he created the new Peter. He did not use anything of Saul when he made Paul. He does not use anything of your old sinful and Adamic nature when he produces the new life of Christ within you. That is why we can now say, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). Thus did Jesus speak to Nicodemus.

Thus does Jesus speak to you, whoever you may be. If you are one who has never believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, you must realize that you will never be able to enter God's family by any achievements of your own. The work is God's alone, and it was accomplished objectively through the death and resurrection of Christ. If you are a believer, you should find encouragement in the fact that all the people of God, from Abel on down to the last believer who will ever live, are born again by the same process and are therefore in the family of God through God's activity. This should be your confidence, if you are a Christian. "For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). Moreover, we know that what God has promised "[he has] power to do" (Rom. 4:21).

Chapter 33.

Flesh and Spirit

John 3:6

The first great principle of the new birth is that God does not avail himself of anything found in the natural man when he begets a Christian. Man is fallen and totally depraved from God's point of view. He is fallen in body, soul, and spirit, and God does not begin to patch these up when he saves him. Instead of the old spirit, now dead, God implants a new spirit, having its source in himself. Instead of the old soul, God begins to construct a new soul so that the man comes to desire new things. Instead of the old body, which will one day die and decompose, God will eventually give a new body patterned after the resurrection body of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the Christian becomes a fresh beginning by God and can be called "a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The verse to which we come now, John 3:6, gives us a reason why this state of affairs is as God declares it to be. Moreover, it carries us beyond the mere facts of the new birth to the principles by which the new life is to be lived out in the Christian. The verse says, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."

The reason this verse gives for the way in which God operates should be especially
understandable to us who know something about genetics. Likes produce likes. A male dog and a female dog produce puppies rather than kittens. Cats produce cats. Horses produce horses. Plants produce plants. People produce people. In the same way, God tells us, that which comes out of the natural man can produce only that which is natural to man and which is sinful as a result. Man can produce nothing spiritual. On the other hand, that which comes forth from God produces only that which is characteristic of God and which is therefore sinless and eternal.

The Natural Man

If we are to understand this statement by the Lord Jesus Christ, we need to understand the terms involved. This is true of any verse of the Bible, of course, but it is particularly true of this verse due to the fact that the most important term in it is used in different ways in the Bible and in current speech.

The term that is turned about in today's speech is the term "flesh." What is flesh? In current English usage the word "flesh" refers almost entirely to the fleshly parts of the body, at times being almost synonymous with the word "skin." Yet this is not at all what the term means biblically. In the Bible the word "flesh" refers to the entire individual—body, soul, and spirit. Since the fall of man it refers to the individual as he is motivated by his sinful nature.

For instance, at the beginning of Genesis we are told that when God brought the first woman to the first man in Eden, Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen. 2:23-24). When Adam said, "They will become one flesh," he was not talking about a sexual or bodily union alone, although that was part of it. He was saying that the man and woman were to be united body, soul, and spirit, and that they were thereafter to become what you and I might call one organism. Consequently, at the very beginning of the Bible the word "flesh" is used to denote the whole of man's being.

After the fall of man the word "flesh" conveys a slightly different meaning, still involving all of man's being but also denoting man as he is moved by his depraved human nature. The term now points to man as he is motivated by that nature rather than as moved by the Spirit.

We can be helped in our understanding by the following illustration. All of us have seen a tug-ofwar in which two individuals or two groups struggle to pull a marker on a piece of rope across a line. So long as the struggle is even the marker more or less stays in the middle. When one person weakens or falls down, the marker moves over to the other side,

and the stronger team wins. In some ways this is what human nature was like before the fall. The center of the human person, the soul, was like the marker. On one side was a person's body with its appetites. On the other was the spirit with its consciousness of God. God made people so that the spirit would dominate. The spirit was to determine the course of human beings' path and development. However, when Adam and Eve sinned, the human spirit died. Thereafter, people were led about by the appetites of the body or flesh with the result that even the proper functions of the body were debased and true human nature was distorted.

We could illustrate the same point by comparing the human spirit to the motor in an airplane cruising at 35,000 feet. The human body is the fuselage. The soul is the pilot. When the motor is running, the body of the plane is an asset, for the wings keep the plane up and the other parts assist in flying it. However, when the motor stops, the fuselage is a distinct liability, for it is too heavy and the plane will crash. That is what it means to be "fleshly." It means to be dominated by the body without the ongoing thrust of the spirit.

At this point we must stop to consider several terms that are synonymous with the word "flesh," for much of what is said about the flesh in the Bible is said by means of these other terms. Sometimes the reference is to our "old man" or our "old nature." At times it is the "heart." We are said to be "carnal," "fleshly," "soulish." The flesh is sometimes called "the natural man." Whatever the term used, however, the teaching is that the fleshly or natural man cannot please, obey, or even understand God.

This is the plain teaching of many passages of Scripture. For instance, David says, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5). Paul exhorts: "Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires" (Eph. 4:22). Jeremiah tells us that "the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jer. 17:9). Jesus said, "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils

come from inside and make a man 'unclean'" (Mark 7:21-23). Paul wrote: "Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8). First Corinthians 2:14 declares: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Whatever you do, therefore, do not make the mistake of thinking when you come to these verses that they describe people other than yourself, the criminals, derelicts, hypocrites, thieves, or perverts of our society. This is not the way God intends them. These words describe every man as he is since the fall apart from a miraculous intervention of God to save him. They describe you. Thus, according to the teaching of the Bible it is correct to say that neither you nor I are able to please God. The Bible says: "All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Rom. 3:12).

Painting the Pump

With this background in the biblical terminology, we now need to get back to our text. For the text teaches that the reason why God does not save people on the basis of anything in them is simply that a sinful human nature will never be able to produce anything other than sinful human nature. It is possible to polish it up a bit and put it in a good light so that it does not look quite so bad as it is, but it will still be sinful.

The natural man does not like this, of course, for most people spend much of their lives trying to improve the old nature. This may make life a little more bearable for other people, even for the individual himself, but from God's point of view it is a bit like painting a pump that is over a well of bad water. It is true that a painted pump looks better than an old rusty pump. It is true that the pump can be elevated. It can be given a gold handle. A person can write poems about it, even construct a monument to it. But nothing that is done to the pump will change the fact that it is over bad water. No embellishment will change the fact that bad water comes from it.

Kenneth S. Wuest has written, "The teaching here is that man in his totally depraved condition cannot be improved. Reformation will not change him into a fit subject for the kingdom of God. The flesh is incurably wicked, and cannot by any process be changed so as to produce a righteous life. What that person needs, Jesus says, is a new nature, a spiritual nature which will produce a life pleasing to God, and which will be a life fit for the kingdom of God. This is what Jesus teaches in the following words: 'And that which has been born of the Spirit is as a result spirit, and is spiritual in nature, and stays spirit.' That is, the new birth is a permanent thing, produces a permanent change in the life of the individual, and makes him a fit subject for the kingdom of God."

Let me ask you Christ's question: Are you born again? Do you have the life of God within you? Is there a new spring of water within or are you still painting the pump over the spring of your old human nature? You must face this question honestly, for the Bible teaches that there is no good in you that can satisfy God's righteousness. In order to please God, you must have the life of God inside.

Life in the Spirit

If you have been following the progression of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus as we have unfolded it, you will have noticed that our exposition of John 3:6 has already brought us to the heart of Christ's argument. A man cannot be saved by any human effort because human efforts can only produce human results. Human results are sinful. Therefore, a person must be born again. At this point, however, I want to take you one step beyond the argument of Christ with Nicodemus to that teaching about the Christian life that is developed later in Christ's discourses and in the rest of the New Testament.

Let us start with this important question. What happens to the old or fleshly nature when a person is born again? The person receives a new nature, of course. He has a new spirit. The new spirit is the offspring of

the Holy Spirit, the offspring of God. But what happens to his old nature? What happens to the flesh?

There are some who teach that the flesh is "eradicated" or, if you prefer this terminology, that the flesh is "transformed" so that it is no longer sinful. But this is not true, and our text refutes it. That which is born of the flesh remains flesh. Paul had a new nature, but he was the first to declare that he also had an old nature that was entirely bad. He wrote: "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out" (Rom. 7:18). Paul's old nature struggled against his new nature causing him to cry out for that victory that only the Lord Jesus Christ can provide. The apostle John knew that he retained his old nature also (as is the case with all Christians) for he wrote to Christians saying, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

The real answer to the question I asked is therefore that the flesh remains with us and, what is more, that it struggles against the new nature. The new nature can do nothing bad. The old nature can do nothing good. So there will always be a conflict, a struggle, a warfare.

When you become a Christian you may think that all your struggles are over, and you may be disappointed and even discouraged to learn that in one sense the struggle is only beginning. Before, you were unhappy but not schizophrenic. Now you are struggling. If this has been your experience, you must not despair. Nor must you think that because the old nature is apparent you are therefore to go on sinning freely every day with the old nature predominating. On the contrary, you have been given a new spirit precisely so that the flesh will not dominate.

How, then, are you to achieve such a victory? There are three ways. First, the Bible says that we are to think of the old nature as dead. In one sense, of course, this is not true, for the old nature is still with us, as I have indicated. Yet in another sense it is true; for God tells us that he has broken its power at the cross of Christ and therefore considers it a dead issue in the life of the Christian. On this basis Paul writes in his

letter to the Romans: "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11). He exhorts the Colossians: "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming" (Col. 3:5-6).

When we are tempted to sin we are to pray, "Lord, I know that my old, fleshly nature has been crucified with Christ so that its power to overcome me is broken. I ask you to keep it broken and give me the victory." God will do this if we ask him.

Second, the Bible tells us that we are to feed the new nature while starving the old. This is what Peter meant when he wrote to the Christians of his day, "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Peter 2:1-2). It is as though the old nature were a lion capable of tearing our Christian life in pieces. God says that he has placed the lion within a cage where he is dead so far as any overt activity in the believer's life is concerned. What then are we to do? Are we to feed the old nature with the world's way of thinking and acting so that the lion within grows stronger and can eventually break out of his cage? Of course not! We are to starve the fleshly nature and indulge the spirit. This can be done only through Bible study. It is only through a knowledge of God's truth that the Christian can become strong.

Finally, the Bible tells us that we are to "live by the Spirit," for then we "will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Gal. 5:16). What does it mean to walk in the Spirit? It is primarily a matter of our inmost determination. God tells us that for a Christian, he has restored that will toward spiritual things that was lost in the fall. Then, let us use it. Let us place ourselves in circles where the life of the Spirit may grow. Let us read the Bible. Let us pray. Let us make Christian decisions. When we do this, we will find ourselves increasingly victorious, and the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, kindness, selfcontrol—will grow in us.

Chapter 34.
The Breath of God

John 3:7-8

We come now to a third reference to the Holy Spirit. There has already been a reference to the him in 3:5, where Jesus told Nicodemus that the new birth takes place "of water and the Spirit." This means that spiritual life is generated whenever the Spirit implants the seed of God's Word within the human heart. Another reference occurred in verse 6: "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." In discussing this verse we spent most of our time on the meaning of the word "flesh," asking how the Christian's fleshly nature is to be overcome.

The next verses deal almost entirely with the Spirit, so we need to focus exclusively on him in this study. To explain it, we must consider who the Spirit is, what is said about his activity, and finally what this should mean to us personally.

The Meaning of Spirit

In the first place, we need to define the word "spirit." Because of the nature of the English language, we suffer in our day from an unfortunate confusion over the words "ghost" and "spirit," which we constantly use in the phrases "the Holy Ghost" or "the Holy Spirit." The confusion arises from the fact that English, unlike most of the European languages, is a fusion of two language groups, one Germanic in origin and the other Latinate. Before 1066, the year William the Norman conquered England, the language spoken in England was Anglo-Saxon. It existed in a variety of dialects, but all were Germanic in origin. Consequently, although there were various pronunciations of a word, generally speaking the same word was used for any given object. An ox was an ox, a brother was a brother, and so on. After the Norman Conquest a whole new vocabulary entered England because the Normans, who were now the ruling class, spoke French. Now there

were two words for most objects. As the languages fused to give us English, in many cases both words were preserved. Thus, we still have the Anglo-Saxon word "ox," but we also have the word "beef," which is based on a French word, *boeuf*, originally identical to "ox" in meaning. In the same way, "brother" is Germanic in origin—the word is Bruder—but we also have the words "fraternize," "fraternal," and "fraternity," which are based on the equivalent French term *frère*.

This doubling of words has also taken place for many biblical or theological terms. It is true of the words "saint" and "holy," for example. These words are identical in their root meanings. Thus, if you should go to Germany today and pick up a German Bible, you would find the words Die heilige Schrift on the cover, while within you would find the Gospels of Holy Matthew, Holy Mark, Holy Luke, and Holy John. The French call their Bible *La Sainte Bible*, and their Gospels are by Saint Matthew, Saint Mark, Saint Luke, and Saint John. We have kept the word "Saint" for the authors but not for the Bible, and the word "Holy" for the Bible but not for the authors. Yet the two words are essentially identical.

It is precisely the same with the words "spirit" and "ghost," in spite of the fact that these two words have taken on distinct colorings of their own as the result of nine hundred years of English usage. Today we use the word "ghost" to refer to the spirit of a dead person supposedly returning to haunt a place or a living human being. Hamlet used the word in this way when he referred to his father's ghost. Nevertheless, this is not the sense in which the word "ghost" is used in the phrase "the Holy Ghost." In this case "ghost" is identical with the word "spirit." Actually, it is because of the tendency in our day to identify the word "ghost" with the spirits of the dead that many ministers, including myself, abandon the phrase "the Holy Ghost" entirely and instead use the phrase "the Holy Spirit," except when singing the doxology or reciting the Apostles' Creed.

God's Breath

If the words "spirit" and "ghost" are identical, and if they do not refer to the returning spirits of the dead, then what do the words mean? This question leads us to consider the root meaning of the word "spirit."

What is the Spirit? Quite obviously, the basic reference is to the Third Person of the Trinity, to God, and on the human level to that part of man that has God-consciousness. Beyond this, however, we find that the word has some fascinating and stimulating overtones. In the Latin language from which we get our word "spirit," the word is *spiritus*, which means "breath." We recognize this truth every time we use one of the English words derived from it. For instance, in English the word *spiritus* has given us the words "aspire," "conspire," "inspire," "perspire," and "expire." They all refer to different ways of using one's breath. When men aspire, they take a deep breath and try harder. When men conspire, they put their heads together and breathe in and out with one another. A man is inspired when another man (or God) blows some of his breath into him. A person perspires by breathing out through the skin. When we expire, we breathe out for the last time; we die.

At this point we can see why Jesus referred to the wind in trying to teach Nicodemus about the Holy Spirit, for the wind is quite evidently an excellent symbol of God's breath. Jesus referred to it to teach that God allows his breath to go where he wishes and to produce effects of his choosing.

In the Greek language, the language in which the New Testament is written, the corresponding word is *pneuma*. It too refers to breath. This word is harder for English-speaking people to pronounce than the Latin word spiritus because of the initial two consonants, *pn*. So we do not have so many words based on it. Yet, we still have the words "pneumatic" and "pneumonia." The first word refers to any tool that is air operated, as a pneumatic drill. The second word refers to a disease of the breath box or lungs.

Finally, just as the Latin and Greek words for "spirit" all refer to breath, wind, or air, so also does the Hebrew word. This word is *ruach*, which you cannot even say properly without exhaling. *Ruach*! It is the sound

of a breath. When we understand this we have some sense of the poetry of the opening verses of the Bible in which the creative Spirit of God blows over the water like a troubling wind. No one English version can capture both ideas—wind and spirit—but the New English Bible at least suggests the idea of the wind, with a reference to God's Spirit preserved in a footnote. The New English Bible declares: "In the beginning of creation, when God made heaven and earth, the earth was without form and void, with darkness over the face of the abyss, and a mighty wind that swept over the surface of the waters" (Gen. 1:1-2).

Our Gracious God

What happens when we take this basic sense of the word "spirit" and apply it to our text? Quite simply it means that a person can be born again only as the result of God's breathing new life into him. What is more, it is teaching us that this never happens merely at man's volition but solely according to the good pleasure of God.

So it has been throughout all history. Take the case of Abraham. He was the man through whom God established the Jewish nation and from whose descendants Jesus was born. Was he a follower of God before God called him? Not according to Scripture. Joshua, in a spiritual charge to the people of Israel shortly before his death, wants them to remain true to Jehovah, so he begins by reminding them of their pagan past as that out of which their gracious God has brought them: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac. ...Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD" (Josh. 24:2-3, 14). According to these verses, Abraham had been a worshiper of idols like all the people about him. Thus, the movement of God's Spirit in calling him was a movement of pure grace.

We pass over the years to the time of Jesus Christ, and once again the unexpected occurs. A Jewish person who believed in Jesus might have felt that with the coming of the Messiah the culmination of God's blessing had occurred. Here is the fulfillment of Israel's hope! Here he is! But God, who knows all things and orders all things for his own purposes, ordered them in such a way that Jesus would not be received by Israel generally and that instead the doors of salvation would be opened to the Gentiles. Who would have thought that God was going to call to himself millions from the nations of the Gentiles? No one. Yet the Spirit of God moved, and the result was a new revelation of God's grace.

One more example will bring this aspect of the Spirit's moving down to our own time. For years now the impact of the organized churches in America has been declining. Here and there are significant exceptions, particularly in those churches where the gospel is still preached and full authority is given to God's Word. But, by and large, membership is down and attendance is decreasing. Seventy-five percent of all Americans feel that religion is losing its influence in this country, as opposed to 14 percent who held that opinion in 1957, and this is true in spite of large expenditures of money and unprecedented efforts to revive organizational Christianity. However, just as many are beginning to say that the trend is irreversible and some are even calling it beneficial, God breathes upon America and thousands of the so-called "hippies" or "street people" begin to turn to him.

The following case history epitomizes it all. Many will remember the late Episcopal Bishop James Pike, who rose to national fame through his controversial opinions and frequent denials of church doctrines. He began as a lawyer, was ordained a bishop in 1958, then together with the man who was then Stated Clerk of the United Presbyterian Church, Eugene Carson Blake, launched the proposal for a gigantic merger of Protestant denominations (later known as the Consultation on Church Union). Unfortunately, Pike's ecclesiastical rise was accompanied with an increasing decline of his commitment to biblical doctrines, which embarrassed the Episcopal church and led to several charges of heresy,

although there were no heresy trials. On the personal level, there were numerous tragedies. He had a drinking problem, which led to his joining Alcoholics Anonymous. He had three marriages, the first being annulled, the second ending in divorce after producing four children. One son committed suicide. After he died, Pike claimed he contacted him through a Philadelphia medium named Arthur Ford. Pike left the church and finally died in the Judean desert in 1969 while researching a book on the historical Jesus, which he had reportedly told friends would be the most sensational of his writings yet.

This is a most tragic story and one that to me at least seems to epitomize all the weaknesses of organizational Christianity. One can read it and think, "If there was ever a place where God could never be expected to work it would be with James Pike and his family." Yet one of the leaders of the Jesus movement in the 70s was Christopher Pike, another of James Pike's sons.

His story is told by Edward E. Plowman in *The Jesus Movement in America*. In his early youth Christopher Pike was a troubled youngster. When he was fifteen a friend introduced him to marijuana. A year later, in 1967, the year in which his mother and father were divorced and his father began to experiment with psychic phenomena, another friend gave him LSD. He turned to yoga. At times he felt that he was confronting an evil force that wanted his soul.

One day, on a visit to the University of California campus at Berkeley, Christopher Pike heard converted hippie Ted Wise testify to Christ from the steps of Sproul Hall. This set Chris wondering. In 1970, in his rooming house at Berkeley, he began to read the New Testament. Here he found what his father with his critical approach to the Bible had apparently missed. He found a real Jesus. Chris felt drawn toward him. In time he got down on his knees and poured out all the loneliness, frustration, and disappointment that had been packed up inside him for years, and he received Jesus as his Savior.

What was it that changed Abraham from a worshiper of idols with no knowledge at all of the true God and that got him moving out across the

desert to a country he had never seen before? Why did he fix his eyes on "the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10)? What was it that captivated the attention of the Gentiles who were the numerical strength of the growing Christian church and that brought new life to them and their communities? What was it that reached Christopher Pike, lifting him out of the despair of his past life and present lifestyle to a fresh, transforming encounter with Jesus Christ? What is it that reaches, stirs, convicts, regenerates and changes men and women today?

It is not the eloquence of human reasoning, though God uses faithful, reasoned presentations of Bible truth? It is not evangelistic techniques or impressive testimonies or miraculous signs and wonders. It is the breath of the living God, the Holy Spirit, who speaks through the Scriptures to create new life in spiritually dead people. It is what has saved you, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ. The Spirit "moves wherever [he] pleases," and God alone must have credit for it all.

Chapter 35.
Christ Speaks to Skeptics

John 3:9-13

Almost everyone knows the difference between a believer and a skeptic, but I am not sure that everyone knows the difference between an honest skeptic and a dishonest skeptic. An honest skeptic is one who may have doubts about certain truths or doctrines but who will face up to them when he is presented with evidence; and he will alter his life as a result. A dishonest skeptic is one who has doubts about truths or doctrines but who will not face up to the evidence. Thus, when he is blasted out of one foxhole of disbelief, he will immediately take refuge in a second. If he is blasted out of that foxhole, he will begin to look around for a third.

Unfortunately, I am afraid that there are aspects to the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus, recorded in the third chapter of John, to

make us suspect that Nicodemus was a dishonest skeptic, like many people today. He had come with real problems. There was much in Christ's teaching that he genuinely could not understand. Yet Jesus seemed to end his conversation with him, not by stressing those things that were beyond the rabbi's knowledge but by faulting him for not believing in those things that were within it. "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man" (John 3:9-13).

Apparently Nicodemus had been refusing to accept that which he could know and was rebuked by Christ for that refusal.

A Difficult Text

If we are to understand these verses, we must first make some effort to determine precisely what they are saying. This is true of all Scripture, of course, but it is particularly necessary in this case simply because so few who read these verses have any real awareness of their meaning.

Isn't it true that most people, perhaps yourself included, have always understood these verses to be referring merely to the fact of the new birth? In one sense, of course, they do refer to it (as I shall show later). But most people take them as referring merely to the fact of the new birth itself and therefore see Christ as rebuking Nicodemus for failing to know about the new birth and about the roles of the Holy Spirit and the Scripture in producing it in men. At the same time, I am convinced that most of those who think this way about the passage are also just a bit puzzled about certain elements in it that do not seem to fit this picture.

For instance, it can hardly escape our notice that in verse 11 Jesus stops speaking in the singular voice and begins to speak in the plural. He says, "We speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen,

but still you people do not accept our testimony." If this is a testimony about the new birth, who are the others with whom Jesus associates himself? Could the "we" be the Trinity? This is not characteristic of Jesus' speech or of the language of the fourth Gospel. Could the "we" be the Old Testament prophets, culminating in John the Baptist? Could it be the disciples? These explanations are possible. Actually, I believe they are correct. But still we must wonder why Jesus would include a reference to the prophets or to the disciples in the context of his own very distinct teaching about regeneration.

Another problem that this passage raises concerns the contrast between "earthly things" and "heavenly things." Nicodemus seems to be chided for his failure to believe in things that pertain to the earth; but if this is a reference to the new birth, it seems highly inappropriate, particularly since Jesus has been stressing that the new birth originates with God in heaven. I must admit that none of these problems is insurmountable; the problems are just great enough to make the careful student of the chapter unhappy with the traditional explanations of Christ's teaching.

Is there a better explanation? I believe that the best explanation, and the true solution, lies in the realization that in these verses Jesus was not speaking about the new birth itself but about the results of the new birth and that he was chastising Nicodemus, not for his failure to understand about the new birth (who can understand it?) but for his failure to believe in it on the basis of its observable effects. In other words, Christ's words refer to the verse immediately preceding—the verse that says, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (v. 8)—and not to the earlier parts of the discourse. In this case, the "earthly things" refer to those results of the new birth that can be observed by anyone through earthly senses. "Heavenly things" refers to that which can be known only through revelation; for example, the nature of the new birth itself, and the atonement, which is mentioned immediately afterward. The "we" refers to all who have observed these things and are thereby convinced of the power of God to change lives.

If I were to paraphrase this passage, then, I believe I would do it something like this:
"Nicodemus answered Jesus, saying, 'I have never observed the new birth. I can't believe it is possible.' Jesus answered, 'Do you mean to tell me that you have risen to the point of being a teacher in Israel and yet have never observed the transformed life of a person who has been touched by my Spirit? I am telling you the truth when I say that all of us are speaking about things that we know personally and are testifying to things that we have often observed in others. You don't believe us. If I have testified to transformations in others that can be observed and you do not believe, how could you believe if I were to tell you about things that can be known only by revelation?'"

Changed Lives

Quite obviously this is a text that has two applications, one to those like Nicodemus, who are not yet Christians, and the other to those who are. Let us take the application to non-Christians first. Perhaps you are one who has not yet believed. You say there is much in the Christian gospel that you cannot understand. I agree with you; there is much that I also cannot understand. You say that most of what you do understand seems contradictory to everything that you have thought previously. I am not surprised. For God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are his ways our ways (Isa. 55:8). You say that you cannot be sure of the Bible. That may be quite honest, for not all persons have been exposed to the overwhelming evidence of its inspiration and total reliability. These may be partially valid, even adequate excuses. But have you never faced the evidence of the power of the gospel to transform the lives of Christians?

Let me dramatize this question by a story from the life of Harry A. Ironside, a story that he tells in *Random Reminiscences.* Early in his ministry the great evangelist and Bible teacher was living in the area of San Francisco Bay, working with a group of believers called "Brethren." One Sunday as he was walking through the city, he came upon a group of Salvation Army workers who were holding a meeting

on the corner of Market and Grant Avenues. There were probably sixty of them. When they recognized Dr. Ironside, they immediately asked him if he would not like to give his testimony. He did, giving a word about how God had saved him through faith in the bodily death and literal resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As he was speaking Ironside noticed that on the edge of the crowd there was a well-dressed man who had taken a card from his pocket and had written something on it. As Ironside finished his talk this man came forward, lifted his hat, and very politely handed him the card. On one side was his name, which Ironside immediately recognized. The man was one of the early socialists who had made a name for himself lecturing, not only for socialism but also against Christianity. As Ironside turned the card over, he read, "Sir, I challenge you to debate with me the question, 'Agnosticism versus Christianity' in the Academy of Science Hall next Sunday afternoon at four o'clock. I will pay all expenses."

Ironside reread the card aloud and then replied somewhat like this. "I am very much interested in this challenge. Frankly, I am already scheduled for another meeting next Lord's Day afternoon at three o'clock, but I think it will be possible for me to get through with that in time to reach the Academy of Science Hall by four, or if necessary I could arrange to have another speaker substitute for me at the meeting already advertised. Therefore I will be glad to agree to this debate on the following conditions; namely, that in order to prove that Mr._____has something worth fighting for and worth debating about, he will promise to bring with him to the hall next Sunday two people, whose qualifications I will give in a moment, as proof that agnosticism is of real value in changing human lives and building true character.

"First, he must promise to bring with him one man who was for years what we commonly call a 'down-and-outer.' I am not particular as to the exact nature of the sins that had wrecked his life and made him an outcast from society—whether a drunkard, or a criminal of some kind, or a victim of his sensual appetite—but a man who for years was under

the power of evil habits from which he could not deliver himself, but who on some occasion entered one of Mr._____'s meetings and heard his glorification of agnosticism and his denunciations of the Bible and Christianity, and whose heart and mind as he listened to such an address were so deeply stirred that he went away from that meeting saying, 'Hence-forth, I too am an agnostic!' and as a result of imbibing that particular philosophy found that a new power had come into his life. The sins he once loved, he now hates, and righteousness and goodness are now the ideals of his life. He is entirely a new man, a credit to himself and an asset to society—all because he is an agnostic.

"Secondly, I would like Mr._____to promise to bring with him one woman—and I think he may have more difficulty in finding the woman than the man—who was once a poor, wrecked, characterless outcast, the slave of evil passions, and the victim of man's corrupt living ... perhaps one who had lived for years in some evil resort, ...utterly lost, ruined, and wretched because of her life of sin. But this woman also entered a hall where Mr. _____was loudly proclaiming his agnosticism and ridiculing the message of the Holy Scriptures. As she listened, hope was born in her heart, and she said, 'This is just what I need to deliver me from the slavery of sin!' She followed the teaching and became an intelligent agnostic or infidel. As a result her whole being revolted against the degradation of the life she had been living. She fled from the den of iniquity where she had been held captive so long; and today, rehabilitated, she has won her way back to an honored position in society and is living a clean, virtuous, happy life—all because she is an agnostic.

"Now," he said addressing the gentleman who had presented him with his card and the challenge,
"if you will promise to bring these two people with you as examples of what agnosticism can do, I will promise to meet you at the Hall at the hour appointed next Sunday, and I will bring with me at the very least 100 men and women who for years lived in just such sinful degradation as I have tried to depict, but who have been gloriously saved through believing the gospel which you ridicule. I will have these men and

women with me on the platform as witnesses to the miraculous saving power of Jesus Christ and as present-day proof of the truth of the Bible."

Ironside then turned to the Salvation Army captain, a girl, and said, "Captain, have you any who could go with me to such a meeting?"

She exclaimed with enthusiasm, "We can give you forty at least just from this one corps, and we will give you a brass band to lead the procession!"

"Fine. Now, Mr._____, I will have no difficulty in picking up sixty others from the various missions, gospel halls, and evangelical churches of the city; and if you will promise faithfully to bring two such exhibits as I have described, I will come marching in at the head of such a procession, with the band playing 'Onward, Christian Soldiers,' and I will be ready for the debate."

Apparently the man who had made the challenge must have had some sense of humor, for he smiled wryly and waved his hand in a deprecating kind of way as if to say, "Nothing doing!" and then edged out of the crowd while the bystanders clapped for Dr. Ironside and the others.

Christ changes lives. He has done this down through the centuries; he is continuing to do so in our century, in our time. I can give examples from my own experience. There are examples from my own congregation. If you are not a Christian, can you honestly say that you have never observed any examples of the genuine transformation that can come about in a person as a result of his hearing and responding to the Christian gospel? I doubt it. Therefore, if you are not yet a Christian, I invite you to face the reality of these things and yield your life to the One who is also able to make you a new creature through Christ Jesus.

Are You Changed?

I said earlier that there are two applications of these important verses from John 3. One application is to non-Christians, as I have shown. The second application is to Christians. Are you a Christian? What about your life? Unfortunately it is possible for a Christian to live a life that is so much like the life of the world that he will never be able on the basis of his life to point anyone to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior. Does that describe you? Ask yourself, "Has my life been changed? Can I point to anything that will hold up as tangible evidence for myself and others of the power of God through Jesus to transform my thinking and my lifestyle?"

I know that there are different causes for unbelief among the unsaved. It is quite often sin, for sin keeps a person from God. Sometimes it is a false sense of priorities. Still it is often true that persons are kept from Christ by a low standard of living among those who are called by his name. Your life should be different. It should reflect the reality of Christ's life within you.

Chapter 36.
The Serpent in the Wilderness

John 3:14-15

There are many things that separate true Christianity from the other religions of this world, but the most important is that Christianity is not a "works" religion. All the other religions or systems of religion known to us through history or through anthropology have at their base some system of good works by which the follower of the religion earns merit. Christianity insists, on the contrary, that we cannot earn anything, that all that could possibly be done has already been done for us by the Lord Jesus Christ and that salvation is therefore entered, not by doing anything but by receiving God's gift. Even the Christian life grows out of that initial and complete accomplishment by the Lord Jesus.

This truth is taught many places in Scripture. Paul wrote, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). To Titus he wrote, "He saved us not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:5). It is not surprising, therefore, as we come to the end of Christ's words to Nicodemus about the new birth, to find another clear and forceful statement of this principle. Nicodemus had not understood about the new birth. He had not even been willing to acknowledge its effects in the lives of God's children. Christ had chided him for that. Nevertheless, Jesus apparently seemed unwilling to terminate the conversation without pointing in some fashion to the basis of the salvation he was to bring. He therefore spoke of his death and the necessity for belief in himself by saying, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (vv. 14-15).

This is the first instance in John's Gospel in which Jesus picked up an incident or practice of the Old Testament as foreshadowing some aspect of his earthly work.

Serpents of Death

If we are to understand what Jesus was saying, we need to go back to the strange story in the Old Testament to which he was referring. The story is told in Numbers 21:4-9.

The people of Israel had been traveling in the desert under the leadership of Moses, and they had recently traveled from the neighborhood of Mount Hor near the Red Sea to the borders of Edom. This is the area of the Near East in which Petra is located; it is some of the most inhospitable territory on earth, as I found out during a visit to Edom in 1961. The Bible tells us that "the people became impatient on the way" (Num. 21:4). As a result of their difficulties the people began to murmur against God and Moses, as they had done many times before, claiming that they had been led into the wilderness to die there and complaining of God's treatment of them. Because of these

complaints God sent fiery serpents among them. These bit the people, and many of the people died. The people came to Moses asking him to intercede between them and the Lord. When Moses did this, God commanded him to make a serpent out of bronze and to erect it on a pole in the midst of the Israelite camp. The heart of the story lies in God's promise that everyone who had been bitten by the fiery serpents needed only to look to the brazen serpent on the pole to be cured.

It goes almost without saying that in itself the remedy proposed by God and enacted faithfully by Moses was absurd. In our day especially, with our knowledge of illness and of the cures effected by the various drugs and antibiotics available to us, we are aware that there was not the least bit of therapeutic value in the bronze serpent. At the best it could have been a warning to avoid the serpents. In such a situation we only begin to understand the story when we see it as a way of pointing the people's faith back to God. We only understand it fully when we see it as intended to prefigure the raising up of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, by which sacrifice we are saved from sin.

Not of Works

The force of the story lies not merely in the obvious parallel to Christ's death, as I have stated it, but in the implied comparison between what God commanded the people to do and all other methods that might have been imagined by the people to have had some value.

Think what those methods might have been. First, the people might have imagined that they could have made some medicines to offset the poison. Donald Grey Barnhouse, in *God's Remedy,* has written well on this passage. "The brewing of potions and the making of salves would have given them all something to do and would have satisfied every natural instinct of the heart to work on behalf of its own cure. [But] there was nothing of the kind mentioned. They were to cease from human remedies and turn to a divine remedy. The fact that they were not told to make a human remedy is indicative of the greater fact that there is no human remedy for sin. Men have been bitten by the serpent of sin. How are they going to be cured of its bite? There is nothing but

death awaiting them as a result of their wound unless God Himself shall furnish a remedy. Men rush around in the fury of human religions seeking a palliative for sin. They perform all sorts of rites, chastising the flesh, humbling the spirit. They undertake fasts and pilgrimages. Like the man in Israel's camp who refused to look at the brazen serpent, but spent his time brewing concoctions for ameliorating his own conditions, they are carried off to spiritual death through the poison that is in their being. The man who trusts in religion instead of looking to Christ will be eternally lost."

In the second place, the people who had been bitten by the serpents were not encouraged to follow any path of self-reformation. We might imagine them acknowledging to themselves that they had certainly gotten into a bad area of the country and had been exceptionally foolish in giving the serpents an opportunity to bite them. "Henceforth," they might have said, "we shall be more careful. We shall see that this will never happen again." Quite obviously, even if they had been able to do this there would still have been no cure. For the poison was in them, and those who had been bitten, died.

There is a verse in the Book of Ecclesiastes that tells us "God will call the past to account" (Eccl. 3:15). This means that even if you were to turn over a new leaf today and hereafter live in a way that was totally acceptable to God—which is, however, impossible—God would still be forced to require full payment for those violations of his law that you committed before your reformation.

You yourself think that way, you know. Suppose for a minute that you operate a small store. You have a customer who has not been paying his bill for some months and who comes to you saying, "Mr. So-and-So, I realize that I have been making a very grave mistake in the way I have been dealing with you. I have been buying on credit, and I have fallen quite head over heels in debt. I am reforming. Henceforth, I am going to pay cash for everything I buy."

You are very glad to hear that, of course, and you say so. "I am very glad to hear that you are turning over a new leaf. When will you be able

to make full payment on your old bill?"

"Oh, you don't understand," your customer answers. "I am going to pay cash from now on.
Certainly you won't hold that old unpaid account against me? I am turning over a new leaf."

If that happened to you, no doubt you would reply and be correct in saying, "I am sorry, but I am unable to do business that way. If you pay your account, I shall be glad to continue doing business with you. But if you do not, there can be no sales. Business requires me to demand that which is past." In the same way, God requires what is past. So no one will ever be cured from the effects of sin's poison by any form of moral reformation.

In the third place, the people who were dying in the desert were not told to band together and fight the deadly serpents. Barnhouse again writes: "If the incident had been met after the fashion of our day, there would have been a rush to incorporate the Society for the Extermination of the Fiery Serpents, popularly known as SEFS; and there would have been badges for the coat lapel, cards for district workers, secretaries for organization branches, pledge cards, and mass rallies. There would have been a publication office and a weekly journal to tell of the progress of the work. There would have been photographs of heaps of serpents that had been killed by the faithful workers. The fact that the serpents had already infected their victims would have been played down, and the membership lists would have been pushed to the utmost.

"Let us accompany one of the zealous workers as he might take a pledge card into the tent of a stricken victim. The man had been bitten and the poison had already affected his limbs. He lies in feverish agony [for the phrase "fiery serpents" refers to the effects produced in the ones bitten, not in the color of the snakes], the glaze of death already coming to his eyes. The zealous member of the Society for the Extermination of Fiery Serpents tells him of all that has been done to combat the serpents, and urges the man to join—as a life member if possible (fee $10,000), a sustaining member (fee $1,000), contributing member (fee

$25), or annual member (anything the organizer can get). The dying victim fumbles in his pocketbook for money and then takes a pen in hand. His fingers are held by the worker who helps him form his signature on the pledge and membership card, and the man signs in full —and dies."

There are some who will think this fanciful and even a possible slander on worthwhile social work projects, but I am convinced that this is an accurate picture of much that passes for socalled humanitarian endeavors. I am not against works of social welfare. Today's great social work programs sprang from Christian principles and in many cases were launched by committed believers. Nevertheless, the point of the parallel stands. Sin is not cured by social organization. By all means let us mop the fevered brow. Let us comfort the stricken patient. But let us also recognize that the cure of sin's sting lies only in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the promises of God that accompany it.

Fourth, the people who had been bitten by the deadly serpents were not told to pray to the serpent on the pole. You must not misunderstand me here. Prayer is a good thing, but prayer is for believers only. Man cannot pray for his own salvation. Christ died for sinners. This salvation is to be believed. The Bible says, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Rom. 10:9-10).

Finally, the people who had been bitten were not commanded to buy some relic of the serpent or possess some fragment of the pole upon which the serpent of bronze had been erected. The notion that salvation can come by relics is perhaps the most absurd and totally pagan idea ever associated with Christianity, and yet today there are millions who believe that they can come closer to heaven by adoring a piece of the cross or the bones of a saint. History should illuminate such folly. During the Middle Ages, those who traveled to the Holy Land were asked to bring back souvenirs of Christianity, just as a visitor to Europe or the Far East might be asked to bring back souvenirs today. The

Arabs, who were good businessmen, quickly supplied the demand and did so well that it is said that the Middle Ages possessed enough particles of the true cross to build several cathedrals. Unfortunately the possession of such relics eventually gave way to worship and to the belief that a person could be saved by touching or possessing them.

It is interesting to note that the same thing happened with the bronze serpent erected by Moses until God had Hezekiah step in to destroy it. Someone apparently preserved the serpent, and it remained in Israel for hundreds of years, gaining more and more worshipers. At last, when he became king, Hezekiah "broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.)" (2 Kings 18:4). The last word, as Barnhouse observes, is a sneer; for it might be translated correctly as "merely a piece of brass." Thus does God speak of the supposed virtues of the relics of a ritualistic religion: piece of bone ... dirty linen ... rusty metal ... stinking candles.

Resting on Christ

By this time, of course, you will have understood that the only thing required of the dying Israelites was that they should have believed God's word about the serpent and have looked to it as he commanded them. In the same way, we are to look to Christ's cross. We have been bitten by sin, as they were bitten. We are dying of sin, as they were dying. God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin that we might believe on him and not perish.

What does it mean to believe? Many years ago now, when John G. Paton first went out as a pioneer missionary to the New Hebrides islands, he found that the natives among whom he began to work had no way of writing their language. He began to learn it and in time began to work on a translation of the Bible for them. Soon he discovered that they had no word for "faith." This was serious, of course, for a person can hardly translate the Bible without it. One day he went on a hunt with one of the natives. They shot a large deer in the course of the hunt, and tying its legs together and supporting it on a pole, laboriously

trekked back down the mountain path to Paton's home near the seashore. As they reached the veranda both men threw the deer down, and the native immediately flopped into one of the deck chairs that stood on the porch, exclaiming, "My, it is good to stretch yourself out here and rest." Paton immediately jumped to his feet and recorded the phrase. In his final translation of the New Testament this was the word used to convey the idea of trust, faith, and belief.

"Stretch yourself out on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever stretches himself out on him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of man must be lifted up, that everyone who stretches himself out on him may have eternal life" (John 3:14, 15). Have you done that? Will you do it? If you will do it, turning away from any faith in yourself, your own good works, religion, your efforts at self-reformation, your prayers and relics, looking to the cross of Christ on which God dealt with sin and on the basis of which he promises new life to the sinner, then God will heal you. This is the heart of Christianity. God has provided salvation for you in Jesus Christ. Say, "I believe that, Lord. I trust the work of Jesus Christ for my salvation."

Chapter 37.
The Love of God

John 3:16

There are many passages in the Bible that have been chosen by some great person or other as a favorite text. John Wesley often said that his favorite verse was Zechariah 3:2: "Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?" David Livingstone preferred the last words of Matthew 28:20: "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." John Newton said that his favorite verse was Romans 5:20: "But where sin increased, grace increased all the more." Luther had Romans

1:17 as his life text: "The righteous will live by faith." Each of these verses has spoken to some man in his own particular condition and has become for him the greatest text in the Bible. But the verse we come to now is everyone's text. There is hardly a place in the world to which the gospel of Jesus Christ has gone that this verse has not become almost instantly known. It is the first verse that translators put into another language. Millions of people have been taught to recite it. It is inscribed on books and buildings. It is reflected in songs. John 3:16! "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." This great verse with its emphasis upon God's love and the gift of his love in Jesus Christ is stupendous.

In the early 1960s, the great Swiss theologian Karl Barth was in this country for a series of lectures, speaking in Chicago and in Princeton, New Jersey. There were discussion periods occasionally, connected with these addresses, and at one of the discussion periods an American asked a typically American question: "Dr. Barth, what is the greatest thought that has ever passed through your mind?" Barth paused for quite a long time as he obviously thought about his answer. Then he raised his head and said with grace and childlike simplicity:

Jesus loves me! This I know, For the Bible tells me so.

This is a truth that Christians in all ages have acknowledged, and the more that they have discovered the person of Jesus Christ in the Bible, the more they have realized it.

I want to look at God's love in this study, our first study of John 3:16, and I want to begin by reviewing some of the verses that speak about it.

A Great Love

The first verses are Ephesians 2:4-5. These are verses in which the apostle Paul speaks of God's love, saying, "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even

when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved." These verses tell us that God's love is *great.*

In preparation for this study I began to think about the term "great" in ways that I had never done before, and I came to the conclusion that we have lessened the force of what God means by the way we use the word. During the week before I wrote this chapter, I had attended a "Current Events Week" at a Christian school. While there I said that some of the points made by the speakers were "great." After the meetings were over I told the president of the school that I felt that the points made would have a "great" effect on the students in the weeks and months ahead. Later in the week I attended a Young Life banquet in Philadelphia, and I said in that context that the evening was "great," that the speakers were "great," that the program of Young Life was "great." I used the term honestly. Yet none of these things even begins to measure up to what the Bible means when it says that the love of God is great. God is the master of the understatement. Consequently, when he tells us that his love is great, he is telling us that it is so great that it goes beyond our own ideas of greatness or our own understanding.

John 3:16 was the verse through which D. L. Moody learned to appreciate the greatness of God's love. Moody had been to Britain in the early days of his ministry and there had met a young English preacher named Henry Moorhouse. One day Moorhouse said to Moody, "I am thinking of going to America."

"Well," said Moody, "if you should ever get to Chicago, come down to my church and I will give you a chance to preach."

Moody did not mean to be hypocritical when he said this, of course. He was merely being polite. Nevertheless, he was saying to himself that he hoped Moorhouse would not come, for Moody had not heard him preach and had no idea of what he would say should he come to Chicago. Sometime later, after Moody had returned home, the evangelist received a telegram that said, "Have just arrived in New York. Will be in Chicago on Sunday. Moorhouse." Moody was

perplexed about what he should do, and to complicate matters he was just about to leave for a series of meetings elsewhere. "Oh, my," he thought, "here I am about to be gone on Sunday, Moorhouse is coming, and I have promised to let him preach." Finally he said to his wife and to the leaders of the church, "I think that I should let him preach once. So let him preach once; then if the people enjoy him, put him on again."

Moody was gone for a week. When he returned he said to his wife, "How did the young preacher do?"

"Oh, he is a better preacher than you are," his wife said. "He is telling sinners that God loves them."

"That is not right," said Moody. "God does not love sinners."

"Well," she said, "you go and hear him."

"What?" said Moody. "Do you mean to tell me that he is still preaching?"

"Yes, he has been preaching all week, and he has only had one verse for a text. It is John 3:16."

Moody went to the meeting. Moorhouse got up and began by saying, "I have been hunting for a text all week, and I have not been able to find a better text than John 3:16. So I think we will just talk about it once more." He did. Afterward Moody said it was on that night that he first clearly understood the greatness of God's love.

Infinite Love

The Bible not only says that the love of God is great; it also says that it is *infinite.* This is what Paul means when he writes in the third chapter of Ephesians that his prayer for Christians is that they "may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:18-19). How can we comprehend the infinite love of God? We can know it, but only in part. We have been touched by his

love and bathed in part of it; yet the fullness of such love lies forever beyond us as the vastness of the universe lies beyond the finite, probing eye of man. God's love is boundless and unfathomable.

One of our seldom sung hymns puts this aspect of God's love in memorable language. It was written by Frederick M. Lehman; but the final stanza was added to the song afterward, when it was found written on the wall of a room of an asylum by a man who, before he died, had obviously come to know the immeasurable extent of God's love.

> The love of God is greater far
> Than tongue or pen can ever tell,
> It goes beyond the highest star And reaches to the lowest hell.
> The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win:
> His erring child He reconciled, And pardoned from his sin.
> Could we with ink the ocean fill
> And were the skies of parchment made;
> Were every stalk on earth a quill
> And every man a scribe by trade,
> To write the love of God above Would drain the ocean dry,
> Nor could the scroll contain the whole Though stretched from sky to sky.
> Chorus
> O love of God, how rich and pure!
> How measureless and strong!
> It shall for evermore endure—
> The saints' and angels' song.

This is our song, if we have come to know in part that great and immeasurable love of God toward us through Christ Jesus.

A Love That Gives

Third, God not only tells us that his love is great and is infinite, he also tells us that his love is a *giving* love. This is the heart of John 3:16. How much does God love you? God loves you so much "that he gave his one and only Son."

We are going to be considering the gift of God in the next study, but we do not want to miss even here the great lesson there is in that statement. Once in the early days of my ministry, when I was still working in Washington, D.C., I became interested in the subject of God's love and discovered as I studied the Bible that there is hardly a verse in the New Testament, in speaking of God's love, that does not also speak in the immediate context (and sometimes within a space of a few words) of the cross. How do we know that God loves us? Because we are able to love one another a little bit? Because the world is beautiful? Because we value love? Not at all! We know that God loves us because he has given us his only-begotten, his unique, Son. It is in the face of the selfless, self-sacrificing Jesus Christ that we learn of God's character.

God loves you! Do you know that? God *loves* you! He has demonstrated that love for you in Jesus Christ!

Unchangeable Love

Finally, God not only tells us that his love is great, infinite, and giving; he also tells us that his love is *unchangeable.* This is perhaps the most wonderful aspect of all. The heart of the matter is that God loves in such a way that nothing you or I have done or will ever do will alter it.

This is a point made by one of the greatest stories in the Bible, the story of Hosea and his unfaithful wife, Gomer. Hosea was a preacher. One day the Lord came to him and said, "Hosea, I want you to marry a woman who is going to prove unfaithful to you. You are going to love her, but she is going to turn from your love. Nevertheless, the more faithless she becomes, the more faithful and loving you will be. I want you to do this because I want to give Israel an illustration of how I love them. Your marriage will be a pageant. You will play God. The woman will play the part of Israel. For I love Israel with an unchangeable love, and she runs from me and takes other gods for lovers."

Hosea did as God had told him to do. So the Book of Hosea tells us, "When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, 'Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of

unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD.' So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son" (Hosea 1:2-3).

At this point of the story God intervened, for he had said that he was going to order each stage of the relationship between Hosea and Gomer. God intervened to give a name to this son. "Call his name Jezreel," God said. Jezreel means "scattered," for God was going to scatter the people of Israel all over the face of the earth. After a time Gomer conceived again and bore a daughter. "Call her Lo-Ruhamah," God said. Lo-Ruhamah means "not pitied." God was saying that the time would come when he would "no longer show love to the house of Israel" (v. 6). Finally, another son was born and Hosea was told to call him Lo-Ammi. Lo-Ammi means "not my people." "For," said God, "you are not my people, and I am not your God."

If the story stopped at this point the ending would be exceedingly dismal, and the pageant would be illustrating the opposite of the unchangeable love of God. But it does not stop here, and God intervenes again to tell how the story will end. "I am going to change the names of those children one day," God promised. "I am going to change Jezreel to Jezreel." It is the same word but with a second meaning, a change from "scattered" to "planted," because in the ancient world the same gesture by which a man would throw something away was that by which he would plant grain. God was promising to plant the people once again in their own land, as he has done in our own generation. "Moreover," said God, "I am going to change Lo-Ruhamah to Ruhamah and LoAmmi to Ammi because the time is coming when I will again have pity upon those who will have again become my children." The Bible says, "Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God'" (v. 10).

The time came in the marriage when the events that God had foretold happened. Gomer looked around and caught the eye of a stranger.

Before long she had left with him, and Hosea was alone.

The life of a woman like that goes downhill. For if she had left Hosea for the company of a man who could give her a Cadillac and a fur coat this year, it is equally certain that the year following, when the first lover had grown tired of her, she would be found with a man who could only give her a fur-lined collar and an Oldsmobile. The year after that she would be in fake fur and a Volkswagen, and the year after that she would be pulling something out of the garbage heap. So it was with Hosea's wife. The time came when she was living with a man who did not have the means to take care of her, and she was hungry.

"Now," said God to Hosea, "I want you to go and see that she gets the things she needs, because I take care of the people of Israel even when they are running away from me." Hosea went and bought the groceries. He gave them to the man who was living with his wife, but he said that Gomer did not even know he had bought them. The story tells us, "Their mother has been unfaithful and has conceived them in disgrace. She said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.' ...She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold" (Hosea. 2:5, 8).

Does God love like that? Yes, he does! Have you ever run away from God? Of course, you have! What happened? God paid your bills! If you have been running away from God, do you realize that it is God who gives you the strength to run? Here is a girl who says, "I don't care if God is calling me into Christian work. I'm going to turn away and marry this young man." God says, "Who gave you the good looks that made the young man interested?" Another person says, "I want to be famous." So he goes to New York and writes a book that later becomes a movie. He makes lots of money. But God says, "Who gave you the talent to write the book in the first place? Did not I, the Lord?" You cannot run away from God's love successfully. You can run, but God pursues you. He steps before you and says, "My child, I am the One

who has been providing for you all this time. Won't you stop running and allow me to take you to myself?"

The final act of the drama was approaching. The time came when Gomer sank so low that she was sold as a slave in the city of Jerusalem, and God told Hosea to go and buy her. Slaves were always sold naked. Thus, when a beautiful girl was on sale, the men bid freely and the bidding always went high. Here was Gomer. Her clothes were taken off. The bidding began. One man bid three pieces of silver. Another said five ... ten ... twelve ... thirteen. The low bidders had dropped out when Hosea said, "Fifteen pieces of silver." A voice from the back of the crowd said, "Fifteen pieces of silver and a bushel of barley." "Fifteen pieces of silver and a bushel and a half of barley," said Hosea. The auctioneer looked around for a higher bid. Seeing none he declared, "This slave is sold to Hosea for fifteen pieces of silver and a bushel and a half of barley." So Hosea took his wife (whom he now owned), put her clothes on her, and led her away into the anonymity of the crowd.

You say, "Is that a true picture of God's love?" Yes, it is! That is how God loves you. Listen to what the Bible says about it: "The LORD said to me, 'Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her *as the LORD loves the Israelites*, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.' So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. Then I told her, 'You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and *I will live with you'"* (Hosea 3:1-3).

Oh, the greatness of the unchangeable love of almighty God! God loves you and me like that! We are the slave sold under the bondage of sin. We are the one placed upon the world's auction block. The bidding of the world goes higher and higher. "What am I bid for this person's soul?" At this point Jesus Christ, the faithful bridegroom, enters the slave market of sin and bids the price of his blood. "Sold to Jesus Christ for the price of his blood," says Almighty God. So he bought you. He clothed you in his righteousness. And he led you away with himself,

saying, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you."

God's Love, Our Pattern

You say "What does that have to do with me?" It has everything to do with you. Are you one who has never known that love, never realized that Jesus Christ loved you like that, that he still loves you? To be touched with such love is to throw yourself at his feet in adoration and marvel that you could ever have violated such a great and unalterable compassion. The Bible tells us that God "commends" such great love toward us (Rom. 5:8). Won't you allow the hardness of your heart to melt before God's love and allow Jesus Christ to be your great Savior and bridegroom?

Perhaps you are one who has already done that. You have believed in Christ, but the reality of that love has become distant for you and you have never fully realized that the love of Christ is to become the pattern of your love. He is to be your model. You need to ask whether your love has been great, whether it has the character of that love which is infinite, whether it is a giving love, whether it is unchangeable. Ask it now. Does your love change when the person whom you love does not respond quickly? Or does it hold firm? Do you continue to love when your wife, husband, child, or friend does not seem to see things the way you do and contradicts you? Do you love as Christ loves? You are called to show forth that love; for as others see it they will be drawn to the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 38.
God's Greatest Gift

John 3:16

It is commonplace in our day to say that God loves men. But many who say this fail to recognize that we know this is so only because of Jesus

Christ. How do we know that God loves us? Not because of creation certainly, for the evidence of creation is ambiguous. There are tidal waves and hurricanes as well as gorgeous sunsets. Not because we tend to value love, for not all of us do. Not because love is "wonderful" or "grand" or because it "makes the world go round." We know that God loves us because he has given his Son to be crucified for us and thereby to bring us back into fellowship with himself. Thus, if the love of God is one of God's greatest attributes (as we saw in our last study), the gift of Christ is most certainly his greatest gift. For it is through Christ that we come to know God's love and love God.

Sometime ago I came across a little card upon which someone had printed John 3:16. The verse was arranged almost word by word down one side of the card, and on the other side of the card across from the words of the verse was a list of descriptive phrases, one for each part. The person looking at the card would read: "God (the greatest Lover) so loved (the greatest degree) the world (the greatest company), that he gave (the greatest act) his only begotten Son (the greatest gift), that whosoever (the greatest opportunity) believeth (the greatest simplicity) in him (the greatest attraction) should not perish (the greatest promise), but (the greatest difference) have (the greatest certainty) everlasting life (the greatest possession)." And then over it all, revealing a spiritual perception that was most accurate, there was the title "Christ—the Greatest Gift."

Have you ever come to appreciate God's greatest gift to you, the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ? We are going to look at some of the reasons why he is a great gift and why you should believe on him.

God So Loved

The first reason why Jesus Christ is the greatest of God's gifts is that Jesus is the *best* God had to give. God so loved the world that he gave the very best.

This truth is seen in several ways in John 3:16. First, it is obvious from the word "onlybegotten," which is used of Jesus. To our way of

thinking, this word (it is one word in Greek) refers mainly to physical generation, but it means more than that in the original language. A great deal of theological controversy in the church was once caused by those who took it as simply physical generation; they argued that since the Bible says Jesus was the "only-begotten" Son, there must have been a time before he came into being. In other words, he did not exist from eternity but rather was the first being God created. This was foolish, of course, because the Bible does not teach this and the word does not have this meaning primarily. Primarily the word means "unique." Jesus is the unique Son of God; there is no one like him, no one who is his equal. Therefore, because Jesus Christ is the very image of God and because there is no one like him, when God gave Jesus, he gave the best gift in the universe.

God also gave the best in another sense. For Jesus Christ is not at all a creature made in the image of God, as man is; he is God incarnate. Consequently, when God gave Jesus he gave himself. To give oneself is the greatest gift anyone can give. Sometime ago I read a story of a minister who was talking to a married couple who were having marital difficulties. There was much hardness and bitterness, coupled with a lack of understanding. At one point the husband spoke up in obvious exasperation. "I've given you everything," he said to the wife. "I've given you a new home. I've given you a new fur coat. I've given you a new car. I've given you..." The list went on. But when he had ended the wife said quietly. "That much is true, John. You have given me everything ... but yourself."

We hear that story and we recognize the truth of the principle: the greatest gift that anyone can give is himself. Then we look at Jesus, who is God incarnate, and we recognize that God gave the very best—himself—for us.

An Eternal Plan

The second reason why Jesus Christ is God's greatest gift is that Jesus was a gift planned from before the foundation of the world. God had always intended to give Jesus. This is why so many of the verses in the

Bible speak of God having put Jesus to death. Isaiah 53:10 speaks of the crucifixion eight centuries before it took place, saying, "Yet it was the LORD'S will to crush him and cause him to suffer." Peter knew this truth. On the day of Pentecost he spoke of Jesus who "was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23). For the same reason the Book of Revelation speaks of Jesus as "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev. 13:8).

We must not think that the entrance of sin into the world through Adam and Eve was an event that somehow caught God by surprise or that it caused God to begin to ponder what he should do to correct it. God knew all from the beginning. Consequently, before he even set the universe in motion, before he created us, he had determined to send Jesus Christ to die for the salvation of our race.

Perhaps the greatest declaration of this principle lies in a poignant story from the life of Abraham, the story of the call of God to Abraham to offer up his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. It is told in the twenty-second chapter of Genesis. I believe that Jesus was referring to this event when he told the Jews of his day, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56), and that through it Abraham learned that God was to give Jesus Christ to be our Savior.

To see the story in its proper perspective we must begin with the fact that Abraham was an old man by our standards when God came to him to ask him to offer up Isaac. He had been eighty six years old when his first son, Ishmael, had been born to Hagar, Sarah's slave girl. He was one hundred years old when Sarah at last gave birth to Isaac. Now Isaac had become a young man, perhaps fifteen years of age or more, and Abraham was more than one hundred fifteen. Moreover, Abraham had loved his son from birth, as any father would, and he now loved him deeply with a love that had grown stronger over the years in which he had seen him grow to young manhood. He loved him doubly, not only because he was the son of his old age, the result of a miracle, but also because he was the son of promise.

At this point God came to Abraham again—as he had many times before—and said to him, "Abraham."

"Yes, Lord."

"I am going to ask you to do something."

"Yes, Lord."

"I want you to take Isaac, the son of promise, the one through whom you are going to have a great posterity and through whom I am going to send the Messiah—I want you to take this Isaac to a mountain that I will show you and there offer him for a burnt offering. I want you to kill him."

I do not know the extent of the trial this must have been to Abraham's faith or how much of the night he wrestled with this great problem. But whatever the struggle was, and however deep, it was all over by the following morning, for the Abraham that emerged in the morning was an Abraham committed to obedience. The story says, "Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about" (Gen. 22:3).

There are many lessons in this story, of course, but there is one in particular that we should see before we go on. On one level at least, the test of Abraham was a test of his devotion to God. Was God going to be everything to Abraham? Or was something else, even God's gift, going to share and cloud that vision? It was Abraham's triumph that he did not put the gifts before the Giver.

Isaac can stand for many things that have become quite precious to you. The Chinese evangelist Watchman Nee once wrote, "He represents many gifts of God's grace. Before God gives them, our hands are empty. Afterwards they are full. Sometimes God reaches out his hands to take ours in fellowship. Then we need an empty hand to put into his. But when we have received his gifts and are nursing them to ourselves, *our* hands are full, and when God puts out his hand we have no empty hand

for him." When that happens we need to let go of the gift and take hold of God himself. Nee adds, "Isaac can be done without, but God is eternal."

God Will Provide

Yes, the testing of Abraham was certainly a test of his devotion to God, but it was something else also. It was a spiritual test or, as we could also say, a test of his spiritual perception.

Think of the things Abraham had learned in the years before Isaac's birth. He had been tempted to think that God would not keep his promises and that a household servant would be his legal heir. God had taught him that the blessing would not come through the household servant. Abraham had once wanted to substitute Ishmael, the son of Hagar, for Isaac—before Isaac was born. But God had told him that the blessing would not come through the son of the Egyptian slave girl. God had shown Abraham through a miracle that the blessing was to come through Isaac, and now God had asked Abraham to kill him.

We must imagine the reasoning that passed through the mind of Abraham in the dark hours of that desert evening. He must have said something like this: "I know that Isaac is the son of God's promise, and God has shown me time and again that he will not send the blessing through another. Yet, this same God tells me to sacrifice him, to put him to death. How can this be? If I put him to death, as God has demanded, how can God fulfill his promise? How can God do it?" The puzzle was real. But then, as Abraham wrestled with this supreme test of God's logic, it must have come to him that the God who performed a miracle in bringing about Isaac's birth was also capable of working a miracle to bring him back from the dead. This was the solution he discovered during the long desert night. Thus, as Abraham started for the mountain in the morning he must have been saying mentally to Isaac, "Come on, boy, we are going to see a miracle. God has asked me to sacrifice you on Mount Moriah. But if God is going to be faithful to his promise, he

is going to have to raise you up again from the dead. We are going to see a resurrection."

Someone may think that I have merely made up this part of the story, but this is the way it happened. The proof of it occurs in at least two parts of the Bible. The first is in the story itself. Abraham had come to the foot of the mountain with the boy, and he was ready to go on without the young men who were with him. As he takes the kindling and he and Isaac prepare to climb the mountain, Abraham says to the others: "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you" (Gen. 22:5). Think of that: *we will come back to you.* Who would come? Abraham and Isaac! What does that mean? It means that although Abraham believed that he was going to offer the sacrifice, he also believed that God was going to perform a resurrection and that he would be able to come back down the mountain with his boy.

The second proof is Hebrews 11:17-19, which is the full New Testament commentary on the incident. "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." That means that Abraham looked for a resurrection.

Thus far the story has already been great in itself, but the point I wish to make is the point that is found in the sequel. Abraham *did* go up the mountain, as God had commanded him, and there bound Isaac to the altar. He raised his hand ready to plunge a knife into his son. He would have killed him. But just as the knife was ready to fall, God intervened. God provided a substitute, a ram caught in the bushes. And he said (in effect), "Abraham, you don't need to sacrifice your son. I never intended that you should go through with it. I only wanted to test your willingness to obey me and to show you in this way what I will do one day for your salvation and for the salvation of all who will believe in

my Son, the Messiah." This, I believe, was the moment in which Abraham saw the day of Jesus Christ and, seeing it, was made glad.

God revealed his ways to Abraham. The Bible says, "Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). So the time came when the events God had planned from before creation and had revealed to Abraham two thousand years beforehand took place. Abraham was only called upon to offer his son. But when the time came for God to offer his Son, the hand that was poised above Christ fell. God put his Son to death, and God's greatest gift had been given.

The Need of Man

The third reason why Jesus Christ is the greatest of God's gifts to fallen man is that he is perfectly suited to the needs of fallen man. Nothing else is! What are the needs of man? What are your needs?

Your first need is for a sure word from God, for *knowledge of* God. Jesus is the answer to that need, for it is Jesus alone who brings us the knowledge of who God is, what he is like, and what he desires for mankind. This is why Jesus is called *the* Word so many times in John's writings. Do you want to know what God is like? If so, do not spend your time reading the books of men. Do not think that you will find out by meditating. Look to Jesus Christ. Where will you find him? You will find him in the pages of the Bible. There you will find the strength, mercy, wisdom, and compassion that are the essence of God's character.

Your second great need is for a *Savior.* We do not merely have a need for sure knowledge. We have knowledge of many things, but we are unable to live up to our knowledge. We are sinners. Consequently, we not only need a sure word from God, we need a Savior. Jesus is the Savior. He died to save you from sin and from yourself. Do you know him as Savior?

Finally, we have those needs that are part and parcel of living a finite sinful life. What are those needs? One way of looking at them is the way popularized by the American psychiatrist Erich Fromm. Fromm

suggests that man is confronted with three existential dilemmas. The first is the dilemma of life versus death. We want to live, but we all die. Jesus is the answer to that problem, for he gives eternal life to all who believe on him. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25, 26). The second of Fromm's dilemmas is the dilemma of the individual and the group. Jesus is the answer to that problem too, for he has come to break down all walls and to make of his followers one new man which is his mystical body (Eph. 2:14-16). The last of Fromm's dilemmas is that arising from the conflict between our aspirations and our actual achievements. We all fall short of what we would like to be and believe ourselves intended to be. Jesus is the answer to that problem also, for he promises to make us all that God created us to be in the first place. We are to be conformed to Christ's image (Rom. 8:29). One of our hymns looks forward to that day when our salvation shall be complete, and declares:

> Then we shall be where we would be,
> Then we shall be what we should be;
> Things that are not now,
> nor could be, Soon shall
> be our own.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest gift that God has ever offered or could ever offer to the human race. Are you indifferent? Or do you respond to the offer, joining the millions of others who have believed in Christ with all their heart and mind and who now say, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15)?

Chapter 39.
To All Who Believe

John 3:16-17

Early in my ministry I talked to a young man about Christianity. He told me that he firmly believed he was a Christian. As we talked further, however, I discovered that although he believed he was a Christian, he did not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ. For him Jesus was only a man. He did not believe in his atoning death or in the essential or complete reliability of the New Testament documents concerning him. He had not even read most of them. He did not believe in the resurrection of Christ. He did not acknowledge Christ as Lord of his life. I pointed out that all these matters are involved in a person's being a Christian, but he simply answered that in spite of what I said he still firmly believed in his heart he was a Christian. Such faith was merely acute subjectivity.

What is real faith? This question is important, for although in one sense the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ is as wide as humanity—the Bible tells us that "God so loved *the world* that he gave his one and only Son"—on the other hand, it is also as narrow as the company of those who have faith in him, for the same verse goes on to tell us that only those who believe on Christ will be saved. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"

(John 3:16). Faith is the indispensable channel of God's saving grace, according to these and many other verses. Consequently, our understanding of John 3:16 will be incomplete until we deal with the nature of saving faith and seek to apply the truths of this verse personally.

An attempt to deal with the true nature of faith is made necessary merely by the nature of
Christianity, for we are told that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6) and "by grace you have been saved, through faith" (Eph. 2:8). Besides this, however, the study is made particularly necessary for us simply because of the extraordinary emphasis upon faith in the fourth Gospel.

It is true, of course, that if one looks up the word "faith" in an English concordance he will not find the word listed under any book written by the apostle John, except for a single case in 1 John 5:4. But this is merely because John prefers the verb form of the same Greek word (*pisteud* rather than *pistis*), which is generally translated by the word "believe" in our English New Testament. "To believe" in someone and "to have faith" in someone are exactly the same thing. Consequently, it is only when one looks up the word "believe" that he finds out what John says about faith and notices John's particular emphasis. Actually, we have encountered the word "faith" or "believe" eight times in this Gospel already. It occurred three times in the first chapter and three times more in chapter two. In our present chapter it is used no less than seven times, twice already. All together there are ninety-eight uses of the word in the Gospel's twenty-one brief chapters. This compares with a combined usage of the words "faith" and "believe" just eighteen times in Mark and only fifty-five times in Romans.

With an emphasis such as this, we need to see precisely what faith is. Moreover, since the blessings of salvation are said to become ours only through faith, and since John claims that the Gospel was written to lead us to faith (John 20:30-31), we are wise to ask how we can exercise faith personally. How does faith operate to make this wonderful salvation mine?

The Nature of Faith

Unfortunately, there is much confusion about the meaning of faith in our day simply because we apply it to people, and people are untrustworthy. Every so often we read detailed reports of some negotiations between labor and management in which the partners are encouraged to work out their demands in good faith. This means that each side is to bargain honestly, believing that the other party is doing likewise. However, when the agreement is reached the first act is to draw up a detailed written agreement each of the parties must sign. Why? Obviously because, although each side wants to believe in the

good faith of the other, each also knows that people are untrustworthy and must therefore be bound by written guarantees. The same recognition lies behind the formalities of the marriage ceremony, penalty clauses in building contracts, and many other things.

With this background to the use of the word, it is no wonder that faith has often taken on overtones of wishful thinking and then has been applied to God and to spiritual things with that meaning. The unsaved world thinks of faith as a "pie-in-the-sky" philosophy and prefers only what it can "see" or "hear" or can be assured of "now."

Similar thinking lies behind any definition of faith that tries to turn it into subjectivity. Actually, this view is probably the most common misunderstanding of faith in our own century due to the impact of existentialism in the church through such thinkers as Rudolph Bultmann, Paul Tillich, Bishop John A. T. Robinson, and others. In such formulations faith becomes merely that which I wish to hold and not something that is related to truth or evidence.

Against these distortions of the meaning of faith, because nothing about men is ever entirely reliable, the Christian must insist that biblical faith is of a different order entirely and that faith in the biblical sense, simply because it is faith in God, is reliable. That is why faith can be "sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" for the Christian (Heb. 11:1). Some have used this verse in support of a "pie-in-the-sky" type of religion but, actually, it teaches the reverse. The word "substance" does not mean "substitute," as though faith were a substitute for evidence. It means "a title deed to a piece of property." That is what faith is. God tells us that although none of us has entered fully into the inheritance that is ours through faith, nevertheless, faith is our title to it. Faith is itself the evidence of things not yet fully seen.

I admit that if this were a human title deed, there would still be some room for doubt. In human terms there would still be the possibility that some office clerk could have mixed up the deeds or that he might have sent them to the wrong person. It would be possible for a deed to be issued when there was still a prior claim on the property or a lien

against it. However, in dealing with God such errors are impossible. God is omnipotent and infallible. The infallible God gives the deed. The all-powerful God stands behind it. When God calls upon people to believe what he tells them he calls upon them to do the most sensible thing they will ever do in their lives; that is, believe in the only being in the universe who is entirely reliable. That is what John means in his first epistle when he writes: "We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater" (1 John 5:9).

Faith's Content

What precisely does God call upon us to believe? The answer is that he tells us many things and expects us to believe them all. The Bible is full of them. However, if we want to simplify the matter of salvation to its most basic points we may say that God wants us to *believe* two things primarily and that he then calls upon us to *do* a third.

First of all, God asks us to believe that we are less perfect than he is and, therefore, deserve to be separated from his presence forever. Another way of saying the same thing is to say that we are sinners and that God must punish sin. The Bible says that this is precisely why we need a Savior. In fact, John 3:16 says it, for it speaks of the possibility of perishing. If we could somehow get by, if we could somehow rate with God either by being a little less sinful than we are now or by trying harder ("we're still number 2"), then there would be no need for a Savior. But this is not the case. We are sinful. God is perfect. Consequently, since God cannot tolerate sin, we must admit that we deserve to be separated from him.

Sometimes people object to this teaching because they think that it makes them the same as the worst criminals. In one sense, it does. Both equally need a Savior. Yet that confuses the point. The main point is that God is perfection. Thus, no matter how far short of his perfection we come, we still come short and, coming short, we miss it all.

Several years ago in America a bit of deadly botulism poison was found in a particular brand of vichyssoise soup. This is one of the most deadly

poisons known to man, and one person at least died and another was paralyzed before the source of the poison was discovered and the contaminated soup destroyed. Let me ask this question: How much botulism poison was needed to make the soup unsuitable for human consumption? A whole canful? Of course not! Several milligrams? No! The smallest amount of poison would ruin the can. In the same way, God asks you to take his word that you are a sinner, whether small or great, and to believe that sin has ruined you.

The second truth that God asks you to believe is that he loves you in spite of your sin and that he has acted in Jesus Christ to remove that sin and to begin to make you perfect once more by conforming you to Christ's image. This is the heart of John 3:16 and 17. We are sinners. We deserve to perish. In fact, we are already under God's condemnation. But John tells us: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." God loves you. Christ died for you. There may be much about this that you cannot now understand. There is much about it that I do not understand. But God wants you to believe that he did this in order that you might not perish but rather enter into his eternal life.

Do you believe these things? Do you believe that you are a sinner? Do you believe God when he tells you that you deserve to perish ultimately? Do you believe that God sent Jesus to die for you and by his death to bring you salvation? If you do, then he calls upon you to do something. He asks you to bring your faith out of the realm of mere intellectual conviction into the area of action, saying, "Yes, Lord, I do believe these things. Thank you for dying for me. I commit my life to you and promise to go in the way you lead me whatever that may involve." If you will make that commitment, God has already given you eternal life and has begun the transformation that will one day make you like the Lord Jesus Christ forever.

Strong in Faith

I do not want to leave the matter of faith there, important as the point may be. For we have only been talking about the initial moment of saving faith, when faith first seizes upon Jesus Christ as Savior. Faith does not stop there. When the Christian is called to faith in Jesus Christ, he is called to a life of living by faith, a life in which his belief in God is meant to grow stronger as he comes to know God better and to trust him more completely.

Someone is going to say, "But that is what scares me. I know that my faith is not strong, and I am afraid that if I begin to follow Jesus I will faint at some point and want to draw back. My faith is weak." Praise God that you recognize that! What you must learn, however, is that one of God's purposes in saving you is to make your faith strong, and for that he will continue to work with you and lead you in every aspect and moment of your earthly life.

Take the faith of Abraham as an example. Abraham is cited many times in the Bible as an illustration of a man who had great faith, but Abraham's faith did not begin great. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews gives us the progression of this faith as God sees it. Abraham is praised for his faith four times. The first verse on Abraham says, "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (v. 8). That was faith, but such faith did not need to be strong. It was only faith in God's ability to lead the Hebrew patriarch out of Mesopotamia and into Palestine.

Actually, the fact that Abraham's faith was weak at this point is dramatized by a very interesting detail from his story. When God came to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham was called upon to leave that place, journey up the Mesopotamian river valley, cross over the northern end of the great Arabian desert, and then travel down through the areas that are now modern-day Syria and Lebanon to what is now Israel. The entire journey measured over a thousand miles. Abraham

began in the best of faith. Yet when we come to the end of the first chapter of his story, as told in Genesis (Genesis 11), we find that Abraham had stopped at Haran, a little town in Syria. Haran was a long way from Ur, it is true, but it was also a long way from Palestine. Unfortunately, Abraham stayed in Haran until his father died, and it took another call of God to him to get him moving again, this time when he was seventy-five years old. At this point in the story Abraham's faith was weak, but God's promises to him were not withdrawn because of it.

Abraham's faith was not allowed to rest at this initial level. The next verse of Hebrews 11 goes on to say: "By faith [Abraham] made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise" (v. 9). This level of faith was stronger, for it was faith exercised in the face of many dangers and difficulties. During these years, Abraham's faith grew remarkably.

In verse 11, the author of Hebrews goes on to speak of the faith that both Abraham and Sarah exercised in believing that God would give them a son when both were past the age of being able to have children. Here faith had become strong, for it was a faith based on the assurance that God was able to perform miracles. The fourth and final reference to Abraham's faith refers to that complete trust in God which he had when God asked him to offer up his son. This was a faith that led Abraham to believe that God was going to perform a resurrection. Hebrews says: "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death" (vv. 17-19).

I do not know where you are along this pathway of faith. Perhaps you are one who has not even taken the initial step of believing what God has to say about your sinful condition and about his offer of complete salvation through Jesus Christ. If so, this is where you should begin.

God says, "How can you believe in my ability to do miracles in your life, if you cannot even believe the truths that I have to teach about Jesus?"

Perhaps you have begun to walk by faith, but you have found difficulties. That is not strange. God sends storms as well as calm. The difficulties are intended to help you grow strong. Learn to trust him. The God of Abraham is the same today; he can help you as he helped the patriarchs.

Finally, you may be one whom God is asking to believe in miracles. I do not know what the particular miracle may be in your life. It may be a personality trait that God is promising to change. It may be a difficult situation at work or at home. It may involve finances. Whatever it is, you grow strong in faith by learning to trust him. In some of these experiences you may learn something about God's plans and nature that you would learn in no other way. What is your attitude? Doubtful? Rebellious? Do not let it be. Instead, say, "Yes, Lord, I believe all you are saying. Help me to believe and grow strong."

Chapter 40.
Condemned!

John 3:18-21

We come now to verses that are a necessary addition to the great and wonderful truths of John 3:16-17. Those verses tell us that "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." When this is said, however, the question immediately arises, "Yes, but what of those who do not believe?" The verses to which we now come deal with that question, telling us that those who have not believed are even now under God's condemnation: "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands

condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18).

Crime and Punishment

Most men and women do not like this teaching. Yet it is a fact that sin has consequences and that one of these is alienation from God and God's judgment.

On one level at least we recognize this in purely human affairs. Some years ago I developed an interest in Russian literature and began to read the great Russian novels. Among them were the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky. Most of Dostoevsky's novels are great by almost any standard, but the one that has remained uppermost in my mind over the years is *Crime and Punishment.* This is the story of a young student in Russia who commits a serious crime. His name is Raskolnikov. Raskolnikov is poor and needs money; therefore he murders an elderly pawnbroker who, he argues to himself, is of use to no one and whose life really doesn't matter. As the result of his crime Raskolnikov is launched upon what he thinks is going to be a prosperous life. Yet in the novel there is a relentless outworking of judgment for Raskolnikov's act. Punishment follows crime. The novel's point is that the young man stood condemned from the moment in which he performed the act.

Most who read the novel recognize the justice of its plot, but the far more serious fact is that the same principles apply spiritually. We must not think, if we are to take the witness of Scripture seriously, that when the gospel is preached to a man or woman the person involved is standing upon what we may call neutral ground. It is not that he can either choose his own way with a corresponding wrath and condemnation from God or that he can go God's way with its corresponding joy and blessing. According to Scripture, man has already made his choice. People have already chosen their own way. Thus, as Isaiah writes, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). Paul declares, "There is no one righteous, not even

one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God" (Rom. 3:10-11; cf. Ps. 14:1-3).

We may not like it, but whether we like it or not, these things are true from God's perspective. We have gone our own way. We have already committed the crime. Therefore, every one of us already stands under God's judgment.

The Case for the Prosecution

At this point, however, we come to a second question. We have already asked, "But what of those who have not believed or will not believe?" We have seen that these are under God's wrath. But now we ask for what reasons. Why is man condemned in his present state? The answer to this question is really the case for the prosecution against man and leads us to the second half of the verse I read earlier and to those that follow it.

The first answer to why people are condemned is that they have "not believed in the name of
God's one and only Son" (John 3:18). What is the name? The name is: Jesus. And what does "Jesus" mean? The answer to that question is to be found in the words of the angel to Joseph when the name was originally given to his parents before Jesus' birth. The angel said, "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). The first two letters of the name are the first two letters of the great Old Testament name for God, Jehovah. The remaining letters are from the word for "save" or "salvation." Thus, the whole name means "Jehovah saves" or "Jehovah will save." It follows then that when John says men are condemned because they have not believed on the name of the one and only Son of God, he means they are condemned because they will not have the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior.

This is the hardest thing for people to do. If you have witnessed to other people about the gospel, you know that there is much in the gospel that they do not have trouble accepting. Most people do not have difficulty

believing in the existence of God. The Bible recognizes this indirectly when it says that only fools deny it (Ps. 14:1; 53:1). Most people do not have difficulty accepting the fact of God's love or God's power. Many people will believe that the same God of Love, who created them, also has a purpose for their lives. If they are not cynical because of circumstances, many will even listen to you talk about Jesus Christ so long as you talk about him as a man who came to teach a high system of morality and to set an example for us to follow. However, if you talk about the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior, as the One who died to save sinners, there you will find hostility and vigorous rejection.

I know of one young woman whose life is an illustration of this principle. She was a student at the University of Pennsylvania. While there she attended a series of Bible studies on the life of Christ. She agreed with many of the truths that were brought out. But when it came to the point at which Christ was held up as the Savior of a fallen, sinful race as the only way in which a man or a woman can come to God, this young woman rebelled. She said, "I can accept the rest, but I cannot accept this business about Jesus Christ. I will not admit my need of him to be my Savior."

The second reason given by John for God's condemnation of men who have not believed in Christ occurs in verse 19. He says, "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." This means that people are condemned not merely because they have not accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior—this could be attributed to a lack of understanding—but also because they actually prefer sin. The light has come, but they have turned from it. They have done so because their deeds are evil.

From the account of the reaction of the rulers of the Jewish people to Jesus during his lifetime, we can understand how this works. These men were the acknowledged high-achievers of the people before Christ's coming. The law had been given. They were the ones who supposedly had kept it. But when Jesus Christ came, he was so much better than they were that next to him their goodness looked tarnished, like Christmas tinsel does in February. So they hated him. The result was

that they preferred to have him killed, removed from sight, rather than allow him to expose the corruption that was in their own hearts and cure them of it.

The condemnation is not merely that we fall short of God's standards of perfection. The condemnation is there because we do not even aim in the right direction. We do not really want God's goodness.

The following illustration will help to make this clear. Imagine a child who is learning to throw a ball. He is to throw it, and his father is to catch it. The child is given the ball. He throws it. But instead of the ball going directly to the father it goes off about thirty degrees to the right. The father says, "You'll have to do better than that; I can't be running after the ball all afternoon."

The child replies, "But you're too far away. Come in closer." So the father moves in about ten feet. The child throws again, and this time the ball goes off about thirty degrees to the left. "You're still too far away," the child says. The father comes closer, but once more the ball goes off at an angle. Finally, the father is standing right in front of the child; the child throws, but the ball goes in the other direction entirely. What is the trouble? The trouble is not entirely with the distance between the child and the father, although that is part of it. The problem is with the child's aim.

In the same way, the problem with sinners is not merely with the great distance between our own level of conduct and God's standards. The trouble is also that we do not go in the right direction even when we aim at those standards.

Finally, John lists one more reason for God's condemnation of the human race. It is because men hate the light. The light has come and men hate it. Does that describe you? Or are you one who is allowing God to draw you to the light that shines in the face of Jesus Christ?

There is an emphasis upon light in this passage. John mentions light five times. "*Light* has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of *light* because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil

hates the *light,* and will not come into the *light* for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the *light,* so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." According to these verses, people do not like the light; instead, they prefer darkness. If you ever come to the point where you do love the light, it must be because God has already begun a new work in you.

Not Condemned

That leads to our final point. Condemned? Yes! But also not condemned. For the gospel is the good news that although you and I and all men are born under the judgment of God, it is never necessary for anyone to remain there. Today there is a way of escape. What has made the difference? Jesus! Jesus has died. He has taken your sin upon himself and borne its punishment. He was condemned in your place. Thus we can read, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

Let me tell you of one young man who learned this. His name is David Hoyt; his story, like that of Christopher Pike (see the chapter on John 3:7-8), is told in Edward E. Plowman's book *The Jesus Movement in America*. David was a member of a hippie community in California when he met Kent Philpott, a Golden Gate Baptist Seminary student. David was already into one of the eastern religions, but through Kent's ministry he began to attend a series of Bible studies that met in the basement of the Krishna temple during the guru's absence. The studies spoke to him. He began to see himself as he really was. His own testimony is that while, on the one hand, it looked as though he were seeking the light through the mysticism of the eastern religions, actually he was preferring the darkness of his own soul to God's truth. Dissension among members of the temple bothered him. He could not seem to find inner peace. He prayed, asking God to show him the truth.

The next morning while everyone was at certain rites, the universal altar, which contained representations of the world's religions, caught fire in the basement. David and the others rushed down in time to salvage the only article that had escaped the flames—a Bible. David

received it as an answer to his prayer. He opened it and stumbled upon the very passage we have been studying. There he saw his own heart. He was one who had been preferring the darkness to the light. He saw God's great love, a love that had sent Jesus Christ to bear his judgment. David said, "I was set free from an evil spirit that had kept me from the truth; I felt clean and whole for the first time in my life."

After that David Hoyt was used of God to reach many young people with the gospel.

Now Is the Time

Does the story of David Hoyt's conversion describe you? Have you believed in Jesus or are you still in the category of those who stand condemned? There are only two roads, two destinies. If you have not already put your trust in Jesus and in what he has done for you, will you do it today? Will you believe on him?

Someone says, "Well, I have been thinking about it." Thinking about it will not do. That great
Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon once wrote that if you continue to think about it, "you will think yourself into hell." "I am praying about it," says another. The Bible does not ask you to pray about it either. If you are not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Bible calls upon you to believe on him. That is all. That is the only useful response. Immediate faith is what I, as a minister of the gospel, demand of you in the name of Jesus who died for you and rose again. Today God sends you this message, "The times of your ignorance I have winked at, but now I command all men everywhere to repent." I cannot promise you that if you refuse to believe you will ever have another chance to commit your life to Jesus. "Now is the accepted time," God says, "behold, now is the day of salvation."

During the early days of the ministry of Dwight L. Moody, the great evangelist launched a series of meetings in Chicago, with promise of the largest crowds that he had addressed up to that time. He was speaking on the life of Christ, and on the first Sunday night, October 8,

1871, he took as his topic the trial before Pilate. As he came to the end of his message he turned to Matthew 27:22, "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called" Christ?" He concluded, "I wish you would take this text home with you and turn it over in your minds during the week, and next Sabbath we will come to Calvary and the cross, and we will decide what to do with Jesus of Nazareth."

It may have been an artistic device. But speaking of it in later years, Moody called that conclusion to his morning's address the greatest mistake of his life. For even while Mr. Sankey was singing the final hymn—

Today the Savior calls; For refuge fly;
The storm of justice falls, And death is nigh—

the fire engines began to sound on the street on their way to their first contact with the great Chicago fire in which Moody's hall was laid in ashes and in which it is estimated that over a thousand persons lost their lives. Moody never saw that congregation again, and some of those he spoke to that night undoubtedly died in that fire.

Make no mistake. The gospel is not for another time, another age, a more convenient moment.

My business is not with tomorrows. Today is the day of God's grace. Look up and live! The Bible says, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18).

Chapter 41.
Last Words of a Humble Man

John 3:22-30

Humility is a virtue all men preach, none practice, and yet everybody is content to hear." So wrote an English jurist named John Selden, about the middle of the seventeenth century. These words are not universally

true, of course, as we shall see in a moment, but they are true for many people and they characterize much of human nature. Although people praise humility, most persons think of themselves much as a character in the Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera *Ruddigore,* who said, "You've no idea what a poor opinion I have of myself ... and how little I deserve it."

We all recognize that humility is important and desirable. It is one of the great Christian virtues, the opposite of pride. But where does it come from if it is so difficult to attain? And does anyone, in fact, possess it? Part of the answer is to be found in the last words of John the Baptist recorded in John's Gospel, for John the Baptist was a very humble man.

John's Last Days

To understand the setting for these words, we must recognize the fact that the Baptist had achieved a great deal of popularity as the result of his preaching. Luke tells us that "multitudes" went out to hear John. Matthew tells us that people came to him from "Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan" (Matt. 3:5). Apparently the multitudes included all segments of the population—Pharisees, Sadducees, tax collectors, soldiers, the rich, and the poor. John speaks of an official delegation from Jerusalem. We are told that on some occasions, John was praised as a reincarnation of either Elijah or another of the prophets.

In time John's popularity came to the palace of Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee. Herod called for John and listened to him preach. Mark tells us that at the beginning Herod heard John gladly and did many good things as the result of John's preaching (Mark 6:20). Unfortunately, Herod enjoyed John's preaching only so long as John preached in generalities. When he was specific enough to speak out against the fact that Herod was then living with his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, Herod's enthusiasm cooled.

John had said, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." This so angered Herodias that eventually she succeeded in having John

arrested and later killed.

At the time of which the author of the fourth Gospel is writing, however, John's imprisonment had not yet occurred, and John was still in the midst of his ministry. Yet another thing had happened. It turned out that the crowds around Jesus had begun to grow, and many who had been following John now detached themselves from him and began to follow Jesus. It seems that John's disciples were the ones most worried about it, for they did not like to see their teacher taking second place to anyone else.

Finally, in the context of a discussion about the proper procedure for the various Jewish rites of purification, someone expressed his concern. "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him" (John 3:26). This was the same as saying, "John, your star is sinking. What shall we do?" It was an invitation to John to feel injured and neglected. To the disciples, John's witness to Jesus had been a very generous thing, and it was intolerable to think that Jesus should now be detracting from the Baptist's ministry. "Rebuke him," they were asking. "Say something to stop him." Instead John's reply is an immediate justification of Jesus' success. Instead of feeling sorry for himself, John actually rejoiced in the popularity of the newcomer.

God's Sovereignty

What did John say? The exact words are important, for they do not merely reveal the state of John's thinking about himself and Jesus' ministry, they also show us the necessary ingredients for achieving this same level of humility in our own lives.

First, John said, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven" (v. 27). This was an awareness by John of God's sovereignty in all things. It was the first of several things that kept John humble. If the newcomer was attracting and winning more followers than John himself, this was not because he was stealing them away from John or

acting dishonestly in presenting his claims. It was because God was giving them to Christ to be his followers.

I wonder if you have a proper sense of God's sovereignty in such matters? To have it will not mean that you are free to be lazy in your Christian life and then blame your lack of achievement on God. John did not do this, for we read that even after Jesus had begun his ministry John went right on preaching and baptizing (v. 23). He continued doing what God had given him to do. No, believing in the sovereignty of God does not mean that we can be lazy, but it does mean that whatever the results of our efforts, we will see God's hand in them and will not be jealous of another through whom God apparently achieves more.

Moreover, we will not be proud of our imagined spiritual insight or be jealous of another's understanding if we are aware that even this comes only from above. Jesus taught this in response to the unbelief of certain of the cities of his day in which great works were done. He said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children" (Matt. 11:25). To Peter he said, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). It is written of Lydia, a woman to whom Paul preached on his second missionary journey, "One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message" (Acts 16:14). Paul wrote, "For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (1 Cor. 4:7).

To recognize that all spiritual insight and advance comes from God is to be freed from jealous efforts at comparison. It is to recognize that all Christ-centered and totally committed service, whatever the results, ranks equally with God. Any task done for God is necessarily a great work.

Self-Awareness

A second factor in John's humility was his own self-awareness. John knew who he was and what it was to which God had called him. He continues "You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him'" (John 3:28).

Do you and I have the same self-awareness? If we do, it will mean that on one level at least we will recognize ourselves to be nothing. This is God's own appraisal of us as conveyed in Christ's famous sentence: "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). On the other hand, it will mean that when we do accept that statement we can go on to recognize the importance of what we are given to do by God. If a person will accept God's verdict, he can become something for God. If he rejects that verdict of nothingness, he is, of all men, the most nothing! If a man will believe what God says about him, he will admit to what he really is and will enter by faith into what he should be in Christ.

In the twelfth chapter of Romans the apostle Paul writes this about humility: "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you" (v. 3). In this verse, although it is hidden in the English translation, one Greek word, *phroneo,* occurs four times. This word describes a man who is in his right mind. It is, for instance, the word that would have been used by a man making a will. He would have begun it by saying, "Being *sane* and *in my right mind,* I ... do hereby bequeath," and so on. The word is preserved in English in the words phrenetic, phrenitis, and phrenology, all of which have to do with the brain.

With that definition in mind let us now translate the verse, using the idea of sanity. "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every Christian among you, do not indulge in an insane estimate of yourself, but rather be sane about it so that your estimate of yourself is sound." This John did when he fixed his mind on the fact that God had called

him merely to be the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ and a witness to him.

Christ above All

The third factor in John's humility was that he had his eyes fixed on Christ. He was the friend of the bridegroom, John said (John 3:29). It was not his wedding. His function was to serve the groom. This too applies to all Christians. If we have our minds on other people, even a little bit, we will always find room for pride; for no matter how bad we are or how poorly we are doing, we will always be able to find someone who does things worse and be proud that we are better. On the other hand, if we have our eyes fixed on Jesus, we will have our attention riveted on one who is so infinitely above us that we will consider ourselves at best only his unprofitable servants.

Arthur W. Pink has expressed it in this way: "Humility is not the product of direct cultivation, rather it is a by-product. The more I try to be humble, the less shall I attain unto humility. But if I am truly occupied with that One who was 'meek and lowly in heart,' if I am constantly beholding *His* glory in the mirror of God's Word, then shall I be 'changed into *the same image* from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord' (2 Cor. 3:18)."

I wonder if we do that? Do we live our lives looking unto Jesus, caring what he thinks and not worried about the critical judgments of those of this world? Or are we constantly thrown off balance by the world and its values?

One summer when I was just a boy, I took a trip to California with my family. It was one of the *Eternity* magazine tours, and there was a great crowd of people along, including Donald Grey Barnhouse. One day a number of us went to Monterey where there was an amusement park. In one building we saw a very large barrel, about seven or eight feet in diameter and about thirty or forty feet long. It lay on its side and revolved, the challenge being to walk through it without being upset.

For some reason this was a particular challenge to Donald Barnhouse, so he started through it. Unfortunately, he was only into the barrel about two or three yards when his feet got higher than his center of gravity and down he went. The first thing everyone knew was that he was rolling around on the bottom. The man who ran the amusement stopped the barrel from turning, and Barnhouse came out. He said, "Start it up. I'm going to do it again."

The man who controlled the barrel said, "Wait a minute. First, you should know that there is a secret for walking through the barrel. Do you see that mirror at the other end?"

Barnhouse said, "Yes."

"What do you see in the mirror?"

"I see you," answered Barnhouse.

"That's right," the man replied. "You see me. Now this time when you walk through the barrel forget about the fact that it is turning. Don't even look at the barrel. Instead look at me in the mirror. That way you will have a true sense of the vertical, and you will be able to adjust the speed of your steps to keep from falling." This time, when the barrel was started, Barnhouse walked through it triumphantly.

The secret of walking through the barrel was to keep one's eyes on the man who runs it. It is the same spiritually. Who is it who runs the affairs of this life with all its ups and downs, all its crises, joys, and disappointments? The answer is: God! Who has it all under control? God! How, then, is the Christian to walk through this life without losing his balance spiritually? The answer is: By keeping his eyes upon God! Moreover, we can extend the illustration to point out that in this life we do not even see God directly but are permitted to see him as he is reflected in the pages of his written Word. The Bible is a mirror that shows us God. "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Joy for Others

Finally, there were two more factors in John's life that kept John humble before God. They are the fourth and fifth reasons for his humility. The fourth is that John found joy in leading others to Jesus. This is implied in the bride and bridegroom imagery, for it was the function of the friend of the bridegroom to conduct the bride to the man she was about to marry. John said, "This is my joy."

Do you know that joy? Some persons think that there is great joy in material possessions, but things in themselves do not satisfy. Others think that there is joy in worldly fame, achievement, or pleasure, but these goals are relatively unrewarding. They satisfy at best for a short time. Real joy comes in being able to say to Jesus Christ, "Here I am, Lord, use me," and then finding that out of his grace he is able to use you to bring others into a saving relationship to himself.

He Must Increase

The final factor in John's humility was his knowledge of the fact that whatever might happen in this world, whatever glory the world might or might not give him, the ultimate outcome would be increase of the glory given to Jesus Christ and the bowing of every human knee before him. "He must become greater; I must become less," said John in conclusion.

Do you know that truth? When William Carey, one of the great pioneer missionaries to India, lay dying he turned to a friend and said, "When I am gone, don't talk about William Carey; talk about William Carey's Savior. I desire that Christ alone might be magnified."

I know as I teach these things that some will be thinking: "Oh, but if I am humble, doesn't that mean that I will never be able to achieve anything in this world? Won't I become a Caspar Milquetoast type of person? Won't I be stepped on constantly?" No! You misunderstand humility if you think that is the result of it. Actually, to humble oneself before God in this way gives one great boldness before men. The Bible tells us that Moses was the meekest man who ever lived (Num. 12:3). Yet the man who had humbled himself before God, who had taken off

his shoes before the burning bush, was the same man who was able to march into the court of the most powerful monarch of his day, the ruler of Egypt, and thunder out God's warning: "Thus says the Lord GOD of Israel, Let my people go."

And so can we! The story is told of John Knox, the great Scottish reformer, that one day, as he was approaching the court of Bloody Mary in his office of chaplain to her majesty, he was warned to postpone the visit since she was in one of her angriest moods and might be dangerous. Knox continued on his way, replying, "Why should I be afraid of a queen when I have just spent four hours on my knees before God?" Here was genuine humility. Knox had bowed so low before God that he did not fear to stand high before an earthly monarch.

Chapter 42.
The Bride and the Bridegroom

John 3:29

These words are intended to illuminate John the Baptist's important role in the great drama of salvation. He is the *shoshben* who, according to Jewish custom, arranged the marriage ceremonies and conducted the bride to her husband. Even more importantly, however, they also teach us about Jesus Christ in the role of the bridegroom and about what believers in Christ have become because of their engagement to him.

In the annals of the Persian kings there is a story about the wife of one of the generals of Cyrus, the king mentioned in Isaiah who ruled several hundred years before the birth of Christ. The wife, the story says, was charged with treason and after a trial was condemned to die. At first her husband did not realize what had taken place, but he was told about it and at once went bursting into the throne room. He threw himself on the floor before the king and cried, "Oh, Lord, take my life instead of hers. Let me die in her place." Cyrus, who by all historical accounts was a humane and fairly sensitive man, was touched by this offer. He said,

"Love like that must not be spoiled by death." Then he gave the husband and wife back to each other and let the wife go free. As they walked away happily the husband said to his wife, "Did you notice how kindly the king looked upon us when he gave you the pardon?" The wife replied, "I had no eyes for the king. I saw only the man who was willing to die in my place."

I believe that if we can enter into the spirit of that story, we can also understand what the Bible means when it shows us that Jesus Christ is the great lover, bridegroom, husband, and provider of his church. He is the One who not only offered himself in our place but who actually died for us in order that he might present us to himself "radiant ... without stain or blemish" (Eph. 5:27). As his bride our eyes, hearts, minds, and souls should be fixed upon him.

Jesus Is God

Before we begin to apply this theme to ourselves, however, we need to see what it teaches about Jesus Christ. This is important, for John was teaching that Jesus is God. This is seen in the fact that when John the Baptist applied the image of the bridegroom to Jesus he was certainly not just making the comparison up. John was applying an Old Testament image to Christ, and the point is that in the Old Testament Jehovah, the God of Israel, is the bridegroom.

The earliest suggestion of the image in the Old Testament, so far as I can tell, is in the Book of Exodus. Here, in the context of the giving of the law, God tells Israel, "Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same. Do not make cast idols" (Exod. 34:14-17). In these verses the fact that Jehovah is the bridegroom or husband of Israel is not spelled out explicitly, but it is implied in the

argument that for Israel to worship other gods is harlotry. These verses are the seed of the later imagery.

By the time we get to the Book of Deuteronomy, the warning against committing spiritual adultery, which is found in Exodus, is changed to a prophecy that this is precisely what will happen. Thus we find God saying to Moses, "You are going to rest with your fathers, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them" (Deut. 31:16).

In the prophetic books we find that Israel has already done this, departing from the Lord. Here the language becomes explicit. Isaiah writes, "For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name" (Isa. 54:5). Several chapters later Isaiah again says, "As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (Isa. 62:5). From this point on the comparison occurs more frequently, several times in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, for instance. Finally, the entire personal story of Hosea and the opening chapters of his prophecy are based on this theme. In all of these books God is the faithful lover and husband. Israel is the unfaithful wife and bride.

When we put this imagery into the context of John the Baptist's preaching, we find that John was identifying the Lord Jesus Christ with God. John preached on the basis of Old Testament themes. He knew that Israel was the bride and Jehovah was the bridegroom. Now Jesus appears, and John immediately casts him in God's role. In mathematics, whenever you have two equations like "A equals B" and "B equals C," it is always possible to make a third equation which says that "A equals C." The rule is that things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. In the same way, if Jehovah is the bridegroom and Jesus Christ is the bridegroom, it follows that Jesus is Jehovah.

Is he your God? Is he your bridegroom?

The Church

The second major teaching of the bride and bridegroom imagery is of the high calling of the church. She is the one for whom Christ died. She is married to him. Consequently, she is called to be faithful.

This is the sense in which the imagery is developed several times in Paul's writing. For instance, in the eleventh chapter of 2 Corinthians Paul writes of his concern lest the church he had established in Corinth prove unfaithful to the Lord Jesus. "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (vv. 2-3). In the following verse he shows that unfaithfulness occurs whenever the church, which is called by his name, adopts "another Jesus," "another spirit," or "another gospel" as its message.

Do you see what this means? It means that the church of Jesus Christ can be faithful, but she can also be unfaithful. She can commit spiritual adultery. She commits adultery whenever she departs from the Jesus of the Bible, the spirit of Jesus that witnesses to him through Scripture, or the gospel of salvation by faith in Christ alone.

Has the church done this? This is a question that must be asked afresh in each age. Have we another Jesus, another spirit, or another gospel in our churches? I am not speaking of faithful churches when I say this, of course, but I believe that (with the exception of such churches) honesty forces us to admit that this has indeed happened in our age. The quest of another Jesus is called often laudably "The Quest of the Historical Jesus." The trend to another spirit occurs whenever people follow private leadings or visions rather than the clear statements of Scripture. Another gospel emerges whenever works are mixed with faith in salvation. This has occurred, but it is all apostasy. We must counter such trends with the insistence that membership in the church of Jesus Christ involves great ethical and doctrinal responsibility as well as high privileges.

Sex and Marriage

In an appendix on the theme of the bride and the bridegroom in *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century,* Francis A. Schaeffer also notes that the bride and bridegroom theme speaks to the issue of sexual morality and the standards for Christian marriage. This is important also, particularly in our day when the old sexual norms are threatened and when faithfulness in marriage seems to be losing its appeal for many persons.

Why is it that promiscuous sexual relations and unfaithfulness in marriage are wrong? There are three major reasons, Schaeffer notes. First, these things are wrong simply because God says so. That which is right is right and that which is wrong is wrong, not because men judge it to be right or wrong, but because good is related to God's character. His character is the morality of the universe. Hence, if he tells us that something is wrong, it *is* wrong, however we may feel about it personally.

The second reason why promiscuity or unfaithfulness is wrong is that these things are not good for us as God made us. It is true that right is right and wrong is wrong because God says so, but it is equally true that morality is related to the way in which we are made. Thus, we find ourselves entering into a fuller realization of the happiness we are made for as we obey God's laws. And conversely, we find ourselves upon an increasingly destructive path when we flout them.

The final, and best, reason why promiscuous sexual relations and marital unfaithfulness are wrong is that these things break the picture of what God intends marriage to be. Schaeffer states, "Marriage is set forth to be the illustration of the relationship of God and his people, and of Christ and his church. ...The relationship of God with his people rests upon his character, and sexual relationship outside of marriage breaks this parallel which the Bible draws between marriage and the relationship of God with his people." Women are to love as the church loves Christ. Men are to love as Christ loves. "If we break God's illustration by such a relationship, it is a serious thing."

How do we apply this personally? It depends upon who we are and where we are on the graded spectrum of love, marriage, and sex. Some are not yet married but will be thinking about it. If you are in this category, you must determine to hold up the highest possible standards of marriage and then evaluate the one you are thinking of marrying in terms of them. Young woman, you must look at your young man and ask, "Can he be as Jesus Christ to me?" If he cannot be, look elsewhere. Young man, you should ask, "Do I love this young woman enough to give myself for her? Am I willing to cover up her faults and be patient with her, as God instructs me to do? Am I willing to die for her?" If you are not willing to do these things, it is not right for you to marry her.

Others will be beyond thinking about marriage. They are already married, and there are difficulties. If you are in this category, you must not give up because of the difficulties. To do so would be to suggest that God gives up on us, and this is untrue. Instead you must love with a love that overcomes difficulties—first, by changing yourself and then by winning over the other person. If you will yield to Christ and his standards, he will begin by making of you a new creation and then end by making all things new.

The Lord's Return

Finally, there is this great lesson in the image. Not only does the theme of the bride and the bridegroom teach us of the deity of Jesus Christ, not only does it set the highest standards for the conduct of the church and for individual conduct in the areas of sex and marriage—it also teaches us about the return of Jesus Christ. We see this when we apply the image in time, for in a temporal sense we are presently only engaged to Jesus Christ awaiting that final consummation of the engagement at the future marriage supper of the Lamb.

Does an engaged woman look forward to her wedding day? Of course she does! So should we also look forward to our Lord's return and act accordingly.

How do you live as you wait for the Lord's return? Let me illustrate how you should live by these two contrasting stories from the book *God's Methods for Holy Living* by Donald Grey Barnhouse. At the time of the First World War there was a young aristocrat in England who married and then went off to the trenches on the continent. The young bride wrote that she was preoccupied with war work and was nursing in a certain hospital. She apologized for not writing often, saying that she was spending long hours every day tending the war wounded. Some time later, when her husband was coming home on leave, a friend, who knew what was actually going on, said to him, "If I were you, I would not write in advance that I am coming. I would simply slip over quietly." The husband did so. He went to the hospital where his wife was supposed to be working and found that those working there had never heard of her. She was not at her apartment either. Someone said, "Oh, she will probably be at a tea dance at the Ritz today." The husband went there and found his wife in the company of another man. In time, he found out a good deal more and was granted a divorce by British authorities.

The other story is this. At the beginning of the same war, in the western part of America, there was a young couple who had made plans to be married. Everything was in readiness. They had a small cottage. They had furnished it. The date was set for the marriage. Suddenly war was declared, and the young man, who was in the reserve, was called up to active duty. He was to be sent to the Mexican border to train before being shipped off to France. On the day before he was to be sent off for training, the young woman said to him, "I know that it is not quite the date for our wedding, but you might be ordered overseas immediately; you might be killed, and I would much rather go through life bearing your name than go through life always explaining that the man I loved had been killed in the war. So let's be married now." On the next day they were married; and for their honeymoon the husband went with the troops, and the bride went alone to the little cottage.

She was very lonely, of course, as you can imagine, and she longed for the day when she would again see her lover-husband. Day after day he

wrote to her. He sent her gifts—a Navajo rug, some Mexican lace, some Indian pottery. Months passed, and the day came when she was so lonely that she sat down on some pillows in front of the fireplace, spread out the rug, put the other gifts on a piece of furniture, and then began to read through all the accumulated letters while having herself a good cry. Suddenly, as she was reading the letters, there was a step on the porch, the door opened, and there he was! He had sent a telegram, but it was delayed, as telegrams often were in those days. He had arrived before it. When she saw him and realized that he was home, the young bride jumped to her feet, scattered the letters about, and even knocked over the pottery. A few of the letters fell into the fire, but she did not care at all. He had returned to her, and having him she had all.

The one who tells those stories then wrote, "Dear friends, our Lord Jesus is coming back and He is going to find you and ... me in one of those two attitudes. Will you be flirting with the world, or will you be occupied with His love letters, His gifts, His work, thinking of Him?" Jesus *is* coming. The Bible says that "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:3).

Chapter 43.
The Revealer Has Come

John 3:31-36

In a small but very excellent book written by A. W. Tozer, there is an illuminating paragraph that refers to the inferential character of the average man's faith in God. This means that for most people God is the end result of a chain of reasoning rather than a reality. According to such people there may be much to suggest God's existence. There is the beauty of nature, the immensity of space, the order of matter. "He must be," they say. "Because these things are, he is." Other people argue in the same way from the experience of a parent or friend. "God was real to my mother," they say, "so he must be real. I believe in him because

others believe in him." Still others find their belief in God linked to their belief in such things as truth, goodness, beauty, or ethical ideals.

Quite obviously, each of these chains of reasoning is unique. Still, as Tozer notes, those who hold them have one thing in common. "They do not know God in personal experience. The possibility of intimate acquaintance with Him has not entered their minds. While admitting His existence they do not think of Him as knowable in the sense that we know things or people."

Unfortunately, although this is primarily true of non-Christians, there is also a sense in which it is at least partially true of some believers. For although they believe in Christ and trust him in one sense, still for them God is unreal and they go through life attempting to love an ideal or be loyal to an abstract doctrine or principle.

If you are at any point of this wide spectrum of those for whom God is unreal, then the verses to which we come now are for you especially. They are about Jesus Christ, and they speak of him as the great witness to God, the great revealer of him. They say, "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:31-36).

The Perfect Witness

What is it that makes a person a good witness? We know something of the answer to this question because of our knowledge of the procedures in courts of law. The first thing that is required if a man is to be a good witness is that he must have firsthand information. He must have seen

or heard that about which he is testifying. For this reason, no judge in the land will accept hearsay evidence.

Second, a good witness must be willing to testify. He must be willing to speak up, to get involved.

Third, the witness must be reliable. That is, his witness must be substantial and possess enough self-consistency to be believed. These three requirements make for a perfect witness. By this standard—and this is John's point—Jesus Christ is the perfect witness concerning God. Thus, in verse 31 John stresses the fact that Jesus has firsthand information concerning God because of his origins. In verse 32 he points out that Jesus did bear witness to this knowledge. Finally, in verse 34 he shows that the witness is reliable "for God gives the Spirit without limit."

Firsthand Information

The first point is that Jesus Christ possessed accurate knowledge of God the Father. This is linked to his supremacy over all other teachers and prophets. These may have possessed part of the truth, but even at the best their insights were secondary. They reported only what God had revealed to them. Jesus was God incarnate. His origins were heavenly. Consequently, he has revealed the truth perfectly out of the fullness of his knowledge.

On this point William Barclay writes, "If we want information, we have to go to the person who possesses that information. If we want information about a family, we will only get it at firsthand from a member of that family. If we want information about a town, we will only get it at firsthand from someone who comes from that town. So, then, if we want information about God, we will get it only from the Son of God; and if we want information about heaven and heaven's life, we will only get it from Him who comes from heaven. When Jesus speaks about God and about the heavenly things, says John, it is no carried story, no secondhand tale, no information from a secondary source. He tells us that which he himself has seen and heard. To put it

very simply, because Jesus alone knows God, he alone can give us the facts about God, and these facts are the gospel."

In his Gospel, John has a special way of emphasizing the fact that Jesus alone possesses such knowledge. It is not present, or at least is not present in the same degree, in the other Gospels. John stresses the fact that Jesus is the perfect witness because he alone has been *sent* into the world by God.

Here a few statistics will be helpful. In John's Gospel the phrase "he (or 'the Father') who sent me" is found on the lips of Jesus twenty-three times. The Greek verb in that phrase (*apostellein*) occurs seventeen times in phrases that speak of God's commissioning of the Son, and there are other phrases that speak from man's perspective of the fact that Jesus Christ has "come." Jesus is the One who "came down from heaven." He "has come into the world." He "came from the Father," or God. In the final discourses, as the time of Jesus' death draws near, the emphasis shifts quite naturally from the fact that Jesus came into the world to the fact that he is now to return to the Father. In John 16:28, the themes of the coming and the return are bound together. "I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." These phrases have little or no reference to the identification of Jesus as the Messiah as similar phrases do in the other Gospels. Instead, they refer to Jesus' ability both to impart heavenly gifts and to speak the words of God to men. Jesus is the perfect witness because he is able perfectly to reveal God. "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18).

Moreover, according to the Bible and to the Gospel of John particularly, the sending of Jesus Christ into the world involves much more than the sending of a prophet, as in Old Testament times, or the sending of the apostles into the world as evangelists in the New Testament era. These men were messengers. They were sent by God. But Jesus is not a messenger. He is the messenger. It is true that John the Baptist is also said to have been sent by God (1:6, 33; 3:28) and that the disciples later are sent in their turn into the world (17:18; 20:21). But neither the

Baptist nor the disciples exert a claim to any independent revelation. They are only sent to bear witness to Jesus Christ. He alone speaks and acts out of the fullness of his knowledge of his Father.

In John 9 there is a story that illustrates all that I have been saying. It is a story of how a blind man came to know God through Jesus. The man has no knowledge of God at the beginning of the story. His physical blindness is a symbol of his spiritual blindness. Jesus heals him. As he does so he says, "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (v. 5; cf. 8:12). Through this contact the man begins to understand something of who Jesus is, and he increases in spiritual sight until he eventually comes to argue pointedly for the truth of Christ's heavenly origin. The high point of the story is reached in the contrast between the testimony of the man who had been born blind and the denial of Christ by the Jewish rulers. The Jews argue from the basis of their knowledge of the law and Moses. They say, "We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from" (v. 29 RSV). The man who had been born blind replies, "Why, this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ...If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (vv. 30, 33 RSV).

The man who was blind had been led by the healing of his eyes to the spiritual perception that Jesus had come from God and therefore spoke and acted out of a true knowledge of God. Thus, while his understanding of Jesus began with the confession that he was merely a "man" (v. 11), it soon progressed to the fact that he was "a prophet" (v. 17) "of God" (v. 33) and then to a worship of him (v. 38). By contrast, the failure of the leaders to recognize the truth of Christ's coming from God actually intensified their spiritual blindness and led to their rejection of Christ's testimony entirely.

Where do you stand in this picture? Are you one for whom God is only an inference? Or have you come to "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6)?

A Willing Witness

There is also, as I have indicated, a second requirement for a perfect witness. Not only must a witness have firsthand information about that which is to be testified; the witness must also be *willing* to testify. Was Jesus willing? Of course, he was. He got involved. Therefore, John writes, "He testifies to what he has seen and heard" (v. 32).

It is interesting to me that John puts the verb "testify" in the present tense here, as indeed he does with all the other verbs that speak of Christ's witness. We would tend to use the past tense, for we would reason that Jesus came, bore his testimony, and then returned to heaven. This is not what John does. For John, Jesus is still testifying. Well then, we ask, where do we hear his testimony? The answer is: in the Bible. Is the Bible something that is dead, irrelevant, or dated, then? Not for John! And not for any who have come to know Christ and to have experienced the living power of the Bible to speak on his behalf. The Bible is living. Christ is living. Moreover, it is through the Bible that he continues to speak and bear his witness to heavenly things in our days.

Reliable Testimony

Jesus also fulfilled the third requirement for the perfect witness. His witness was consistent. It was complete and therefore totally reliable. John indicates this when he writes, "For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands" (vv. 34-35).

I must admit that because of the way this phrase is written in the Greek, several different interpretations of it are possible. It could mean three things. First, it could mean that Jesus Christ gives the Spirit to believers without measure. The verse has often been taken in that light, but this view is faulty. Certainly Jesus does not withhold the Spirit from his own. But whatever the case, none of us possesses the Spirit in the measure that he is possessed by Jesus; and it is far more true to say of

ourselves, as is said elsewhere, that "to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it" (Eph. 4:7).

The verse could also mean that the Spirit does not give by measure; that is, that the Spirit himself gives liberally. That is true in one sense, but it does not seem to fit the context of these verses and is at best only a barely possible reading of the Greek text.

The third view, the one that is to be preferred, is that the Father has not withheld any measure of the Spirit from the Son. This is John's way of saying that there is perfect communion and communication between the Son and the Father, with the result that the Father guarantees the truth and total reliability of Christ's words. This is not true of any other religious teacher; in fact, no other teacher (except a madman) would claim it. In all the teaching of all the other religious teachers of this world, truth is always mixed with falsehood. Therefore, those who teach, if they are wise, always point beyond themselves to that which is higher. This was never done by Jesus.
Others pointed down the road to a far destination. Jesus claimed that he was that destination.
Others taught that they had aspects of the truth. Jesus said that the truth had come in his person. Others offered to show the way to God. Jesus said that he is the way to God. "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Are these things true? If they are, Jesus is the only truly reliable witness to who God is and to what he requires. Since he requires your life and total allegiance, you ought (as the man who had been born blind) to worship him.

Running Away

At the end of his book, *Runaway World,* Michael Green, the principal of London Divinity School, deals with the means men and women use to escape an honest investigation of Christ's claims. Sex is one obvious means of escape, according to Green. So are drugs, mysticism, conformity to our culture, the rat race, vice, even (for some persons)

social involvement. Perhaps you are involved in one or more of these pursuits as a means of escape from the claims of Jesus.

But what of him? Is he the One he says he is? If he is, none of these means of escape will do. In fact, in order that no one might miss this, John ends his whole presentation of Christ's claims with a forthright statement of the issues, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (v. 36).

What will you say when you meet him? What possible excuse can you offer? Green writes: "'I didn't believe you ever existed?' What utter nonsense; what culpable ignorance of the evidence! 'I didn't think your life was attractive enough, noble enough'? What manifest hypocrisy: it was rather that the standards of the man of Nazareth were too high, too costly, was it not? Or shall the excuse be simply 'I did not bother'? How do you think that will look to the Son of God, who became man for you, loved and died for you, rose again in order to take over your life and make a new man of you? No, all excuses will wither and wilt before the truth, the love, the selfsacrifice of Jesus. Final truth about the world, mankind and God has been disclosed by the Other who came into our very midst, the one who declared 'I am the truth.' By our relation to him we shall be judged."

It is my profound prayer, as we close our studies of this great third chapter of John's Gospel, that you will not ignore Christ's witness but instead will enter into eternal life through believing in and committing yourself to him who died for you and rose again.

Chapter 44.
Christ at Sychar's Well

John 4:1-6

During the years that I spent in Europe studying for the Christian ministry, I had opportunities to witness the universality of the gospel call that is generally lacking to one who spends his whole life in America.

I remember particularly a combination of such opportunities that occurred toward the end of my three-year residency in Switzerland. Within a week of having completed my doctoral examinations at the University of Basel, I left Basel for Berlin for the first great World Congress on Evangelism sponsored on that occasion by Billy Graham and the evangelical Protestant magazine *Christianity Today.* As I boarded one flight after another on the way to Berlin—for the routing required several changes—I noticed that others, obviously also bound for the meetings, began to board the planes. At first there were workers from Switzerland—Germans, Americans, and Swiss. Then there were those from other parts of Europe—Frenchmen, British citizens, Italians. Eventually there were some from the nations of Africa and Asia. By the time we had arrived in Berlin and the other delegates had also assembled, more than 1, 200 had gathered from a total of more than one hundred nations, and the four official languages of the assembly—French, English, German, and Spanish—were supplemented by dozens of others spoken in the corridors of the *Kongresshalle,* where the meetings were held, and in the hotels. Socially, the delegates spanned the gap from Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia to recent converts from the pagan tribes of Ecuador, Indonesia, and rural Africa.

The day after the Congress closed, I returned to Basel to my duties as pastor of the small church that had grown up there during the years I had spent in Switzerland. I remember that as I stood up to preach the next Sunday, I thought of the correspondingly wide breadth of backgrounds and experiences that were represented even in this one small congregation. It was a world congress in miniature. Here were Swiss, German, American, British, Japanese, and Filipino Christians, and they too represented extremes of intellect, education, wealth, and social position.

In America, where there is not so great an extreme of nationalities and where the churches are often unfortunately socially oriented, the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ speaks to all men is not always so apparent. Still this is true, and we correctly sing:

> In Christ there is no East or West,
> In him no South or North,
> But one great fellowship of love
> Throughout the whole wide earth.

According to God's Word, there is no child of Adam who may not come freely and boldly to the Lord Jesus Christ and in him find a glorious salvation.

This is the true universalism of the Christian faith, not that all men *will* be saved but that all men *may* be saved. It is the teaching of Scripture that no one will ever be barred from Christ because of his sex, intellect, education, race, nationality, wealth, or social position. This simplicity is the glory of God's grace.

A Second Example

Today we come to a dramatization of this principle from the fourth chapter of John's Gospel. If you can remember back to the first of our studies in the third chapter, you will recall that Nicodemus, who appears in that chapter, is the first person introduced by John to show the need of men and women for the gospel of Jesus Christ and to provide a context in which Jesus explains what it is he offers them. At the end of chapter 2, John wrote of the initial response of some men to Jesus: "But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all *men.* He did not need *man's* testimony about *man,* for he knew what was in a *man*" (John 2:24-25). The next verse, 3:1, then begins "Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus..." Quite obviously Nicodemus is brought forward as John's first great example of the human race.

We must not think, however, that Nicodemus was the only one who needed the gospel. There were others; in fact, all men and women need it. Thus, to learn this truth we are brought to the second of John's

examples, the unnamed woman whom Jesus met in Samaria in the vicinity of Sychar's well.

According to John, the woman of Samaria was an immoral woman; and she apparently had a bad reputation, if we are to judge by the fact that she came to draw water in the heat of the day when no one else, particularly the other women, would be present at Jacob's well. She came for water only. But instead she met Jesus. He spoke to her and gave her the water of life, a gift that she had never dreamed of but that satisfied her most important thirst—her thirst for God—completely. The story closes with the witness of this woman to others from her town, with the result that many of them also believed on Jesus, confessing that he was the Messiah and their Savior.

It is difficult to imagine a greater contrast between two persons than the contrast between the important and sophisticated Nicodemus, this ruler of the Jews, and the simple Samaritan woman. He was a Jew; she a Samaritan. He was a Pharisee; she belonged to no religious party. He was a politician; she had no status whatever. He was a scholar; she was uneducated. He was highly moral; she was immoral. He had a name; she is nameless. He was a man; she was a woman. He came at night, to protect his reputation; she, who had no reputation, came at noon. Nicodemus came seeking; the woman was sought by Jesus.

A great contrast. Yet the point of the stories is that both the man and the woman needed the gospel and were welcome to it. If Nicodemus is an example of the truth that no one can rise so high as to be above salvation, the woman is an example of the truth that none can sink too low. Thus, it is by no means an accident that John has placed these two wonderful stories together at the beginning of his Gospel and that they end in 4:42, with the Samaritans' statement that "This man really is the Savior of the *world*."

Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior? If you do not, you should learn that the gospel is as much for you as it is for anyone and that you need it as much as did the respected Nicodemus or the immoral woman of Samaria.

A Race without God

The fact that Nicodemus and the woman were different is important. It makes the point I have just elaborated. Yet if we are to proceed further with the story, we need to abandon the differences between the man and the woman at this point and instead concentrate on their similarities. Surprisingly, as we do this we find that the similarities are even more important than the differences and that it is on this basis alone that our study really can go forward.

What is it that Nicodemus and the woman at Sychar's well had in common? One answer is that they both thought that they were all right spiritually. There was an inner hunger, to be sure. This appears in the stories, and I will mention it later. But in their minds, and perhaps also in their entire outlook on life, each thought that he or she was all right. Nicodemus thought so because of his religious and intellectual achievements, the woman because of her superstitions and the religious traditions of the Samaritans. It is noteworthy that in their conviction that all was well when all was not well, Nicodemus and the woman have a great deal in common with the majority of those who live in our own very self-satisfied era.

Second, both Nicodemus and the woman were crudely literal, or materialistic, in their reaction to Jesus' spiritual teaching. In each case Jesus taught about the need for receiving new life from him. But when he spoke of it to Nicodemus, using the image of the new birth, Nicodemus thought that he was talking about obstetrics. And when Jesus spoke to the woman of the possibility of receiving "living water," she thought only in terms of the great distance between her home and Sychar's well and of the joy of not having to carry the heavy waterpots. These reactions were an illustration of the teaching of the apostle Paul given later to the Corinthians; for Paul was speaking of such spiritual blindness when he wrote, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

Unfortunately, in their naturalistic reaction to Christ's teaching Nicodemus and the woman are also one with men and women of all ages, perhaps, above all, those of our own very materialistic age. Today we are asked, "Hasn't science shown beyond all doubt that we are living within a closed materialistic system and therefore are without and have no need of God?" We are asked, "Aren't the aspects of human behavior that used to be called religious really only a projection of family relationships and therefore entirely explicable in terms of present-day psychology? In fact, isn't religion itself merely a primitive attempt to give meaning to the data of human experience, a task which has now been achieved much more completely and satisfactorily through scientific investigation and discovery?" To persons asking such questions reality is limited to that which the five senses can grasp, and the most important terms of Christianity are meaningless. It follows from this that the twentieth-century materialist, just as certainly as the first-century materialist, needs to meet the Christ of Christianity and come to know the supernatural basis and reality of the Christian faith.

John R. W. Stott of All Souls' Church in London has written that what such people need is to be confronted with what he calls "authentic" Christianity. "Authentic Christianity—the Christianity of Christ and His apos-tles—is supernatural Christianity. It is not a tame and harmless ethic, consisting of a few moral platitudes, spiced with a dash of religion. It is rather a resurrection religion, a life by the power of God."

Third, Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria had in common the fact that they, like all men and women, were empty spiritually and thus sensed a need for God even though their outlook on life and their intellectual convictions denied it.

Do you sense this need? Many have known and spoken of it even though they may not have known precisely what it was they needed or longed for. One commentator calls attention to an expression of this from the pen of Sinclair Lewis. In one of his books, Lewis writes of a respectable business man who has kicked over the traces and gone off with a girl he thinks he loves. She says to him, "On the surface we seem quite different; but deep down we are fundamentally the same. We are

both desperately unhappy about something—and we don't know what it is." The woman at the well could have said this to Nicodemus. Many women could say it to their husbands, many men to their wives. What is this longing? Augustine probably talked about it best when he confessed to God, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

Finally, Nicodemus and the woman had in common the fact that they were lost spiritually; that is, in the words of the apostle Paul, they had "sinned and [had fallen] short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). This was the root of all their other problems and was their most significant similarity.

What does it mean to be lost? The dictionary defines "lost" as "ruined, destroyed, having wandered from the way, absorbed, wasted, hardened beyond sensibility or recovery, insensible." If to these definitions we add the thoughts of deliberate waywardness and rebellion, the resulting definition is not far from the biblical teaching about man as he is apart from God. Romans 3:12 tells us that "all have turned away," that we have "together become worthless." In this verse the word that is translated "turned away" means lost as the result of an active, willful departure from God's way. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, uses the same word 139 times to paint a horrible picture of our rebellious race.

According to God, mankind has willfully abandoned the way to him. "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). One commentator has written on this point, "We have rejected the law of God, spurned his calls of love, refused his counsel and laughed at his reproof. We have become worse than beasts in our relationship with our Creator. In our language, we speak of 'animal characteristics' in man and call the obstinate ones mulish, dogged, or pigheaded. But God tells us that this is to insult the animal creation, for we read: Tor the Lord hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass, his master's crib; but [my people] know nothing, my people have no intelligence'

(Isa. 1:2, 3). And our Lord laments over us, 'Woe to the sinful nation, to the people laden with iniquities, to the race of evil ones, to the rotten children. They have abandoned the Lord. They have despised the Holy One of Israel. They have drawn themselves backwards' (v. 4).

"From Genesis, where we find sinning man hiding among the trees, to Malachi, where God declares 'ye are turned aside out of the way' (Mal. 2:8) there is one long history of sin against love and rejection of grace. The position of man is even worse than that of the Devil, the fallen angels, and the demons. There is no record that there was ever made to them an offer of salvation, but of the human race there is the record that the greatest love of the universe was offered to them and that they wilfully rejected it. The Lord Jesus Christ stands weeping, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathered her chickens under her wings, and ye would not' (Matt. 23:37)."

The Way Let me ask this simple question. What do you need to do when you are lost? You need to find the way back. And what do you need if you are unable to find it? You need a Savior. Imagine yourself without a sure direction, without the necessities of life, without any confidence in the future. What do you do? You look for one who can save you and show you the way home.

That is what Jesus came to do. He came to show a fallen, rebellious race, a race composed of people like Nicodemus, the woman of Samaria, you and me, the way home to God our heavenly Father. Of course, there is one great difference between the salvation that Jesus brought and the salvation that might be brought to someone merely lost in the woods. In the second case, the way need only be shown. In Jesus' case, the way had to be made, as it was, by his death. Jesus died for you in order that he might bear all the judgment and wrath of God that should have fallen on you because of your sin.

Will you come to him? There is no other way. The Bible says that God's righteousness, which is by faith in Jesus, is offered "to all"—that is the

true universalism of the Christian faith—but that it comes only "to all who believe" (Rom. 3:22).

Chapter 45.
Living Water

John 4:7-14

In the city of Philadelphia, where I live, there is a beautiful drive that leads out of the city along the eastern bank of the Schuylkill River. Along the drive there is a section of the riverbank lined with boathouses, called Boathouse Row; and across from Boathouse Row there is a statue of a pilgrim with a Bible under his arm. Many who pass the statue by car never see more than the pilgrim. But if a person is on foot and is exploring the riverbank, he soon finds a stream that empties into the Schuylkill near the pilgrim, as well as a trail that winds along it. If he follows this trail up over Sedgley Hill toward Brewery Town, he comes upon the source of the spring.
There, over the spring's source, he sees an inscription once placed by the city government— "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again."

The quotation over the source of Sedgley spring is true, so far as it goes. No one would think of denying it. But it is only half a quotation. For the other half of the quotation one must turn to Christ's words to the woman of Samaria when she came to Jacob's well to draw water.

As Jesus spoke to the woman about water he made the obvious statement—"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again." But then he also made a second statement, and in this statement there is a great promise. He offered a new kind of water, saying, "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). This promise is the basis for our study in this chapter.

A Weary Christ

It is not often that I have been really thirsty—certainly not in this country—but of one thing about thirst I am convinced: most people understand very little about it until they spend time in a tropical land, particularly an arid and extremely warm land such as the Middle East. Several times when I have been traveling in the Middle East I have found myself in places where a traveler dared not drink the water. I remember vividly how uncomfortable and at times almost desperate one becomes until a place is reached where the water is drinkable and intense thirst can be quenched. People seldom experience this in America and other English-speaking lands. So in our literature water appears often as a symbol of beauty or perhaps (in great quantities) even of destruction but seldom as a symbol for life. It is entirely different in a culture where water is a symbol of that without which a person will surely die.

We must see this as we turn to Jesus' conversation with the woman of Samaria, for the point there is that Jesus is as necessary for spiritual life as water is for physical life.

Jesus had been traveling with his disciples from the area of the lower Jordan to Galilee and had to go through Samaria, as the story tells us (v. 4). This was not entirely true in a purely geographical sense. From the area of the lower Jordan to Galilee there were two routes. One led through Perea on the eastern side of the Jordan to the northern end of the valley where it crossed over into Galilee. The other, the way Jesus took, went through Samaria, the country west of the Jordan. Normally, orthodox Jews would take the eastern route; it was longer but it avoided Samaria. They did this because of their hostility toward the Samaritans. When John tells us, then, that Jesus "must needs" go through Samaria, he obviously means Jesus had to go that way to meet the Samaritan woman.

So Jesus went through Samaria. About noon on the second day of travel he came to the vicinity of the Samaritan town of Sychar. Being tired from his journey, he sat at the foot of the hill leading up to Sychar, on

the edge of Jacob's well. The disciples were sent off to the city to buy something to eat while Jesus rested.

What a picture of Jesus! Here was a Jesus who was not wearied merely by the heat. He could have stayed in the cooler area of the Jordan. Here was a Jesus who was wearied in his search for sinners and who had become thirsty seeking those to whom he was to offer the water of life. On the same errand he would one day experience an even greater thirst on the cross. One of the great devotional writers of our time, Geoffrey T. Bull, a missionary the Chinese imprisoned on the Tibetan border from 1950 to 1953 but later released, remarks on this aspect of Jesus' encounter with the woman: "If she could have seen just then what Jesus saw, she would have glimpsed another noonday when the sun would mourn in blackness and this same Stranger cry out from a Roman cross, 'I thirst!' She would have seen in him the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, the smitten Christ from whom the living waters flow. ...He was thirstier than she knew. He was speaking for the very heart of God. He was moving in the travail of his soul and looked for satisfaction in the restoration of this sin scarred woman."

Jesus became man and experienced all that we experience, but the point of the incarnation is that he did this to redeem men. So if he was weary, thirsty, hot, and on the road to even greater suffering, he was weary and hot for your sake and mine. Jesus suffered for the Nicodemuses, the women of Samaria, and the others whom this world holds. If you are already a believer, perhaps you should ask yourself whether you have ever wearied yourself in the pursuit of other men and women. Have you ever become hot or uncomfortable trying to communicate the gospel to others?

A Thirsty Woman

There is another picture in the first verses of John 4. The one picture is of a wearied Christ. The second is of the woman. She was a Samaritan, and she undoubtedly had had many opportunities to return the hatred of the Jews for the Samaritans by hating the Jews in return. Perhaps she had even had a taste of their hostility a few minutes before meeting

Jesus, for she was coming down the hill at the same time that Peter and the other disciples had gone up, and we can be certain that at this stage of their lives, Peter and the others would never have moved off the path for any woman, much less a Samaritan and one with loose morals at that. Perhaps she had been pushed aside or made to wait while the body of Galileans marched by.

Probably she came to the bottom of the hill with this fresh reminder of the hatred of the Jews in her mind, and as soon as she got to the well the first thing that she discovered was another Jew. She could tell he was a Jew by his dress. She was silent. She wasn't about to speak to him! While she was getting ready to lower her bucket into the well, however, Jesus made a request. He asked for a drink. When she remarked at the fact that he, a Jew, should do something as unheard of as to ask water of a Samaritan woman, he aroused her curiosity even further by offering her a new kind of water, "living water," that would be a spring of water within her "welling up to eternal life."

This is always the way it is in the spiritual realm. Jesus comes to us first. If we were left to ourselves, we would leave him sitting on the edge of the well forever. But he does not leave us to ourselves. Instead he comes to us. He asks the first question. He initiates the conversation. He uses all devices to break through to our hearts. Sometimes it is a question, sometimes a command, sometimes a chance remark made by someone else, but it is always from him.

Jesus offered the woman "living water." But what does that mean? What does it mean when he offers it to us? The woman, of course, at first understood the words with crude literalness, just as Nicodemus had understood the words about being "born again" literally. In Jewish speech the phrase "living water" meant water that was flowing, like water in a river or stream, as opposed to water that was stagnant, as in a cistern or well. Living water was considered to be better. Therefore, when Jesus said that he could give her "living water" the woman quite naturally thought of a stream. She wanted to know where Jesus had found it. From the tone of her remarks it is evident that she even thought his claim a bit blasphemous, for it was a claim to have done

something greater than her ancestor Jacob had been able to do. Had Jacob been able to find a stream he would certainly not have taken the trouble to dig a well that was roughly a hundred feet deep. This was the level on which the woman was thinking.

Still the phrase should have meant more than this to anyone who was accustomed to thinking biblically. It should have meant more than this to the woman. Many times in the Old Testament God is pictured as the One who alone can supply living water to satisfy the thirst for God that exists in man's soul.

Isaiah wrote, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isa. 12:3). David said, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God" (Ps. 42:1). God declared through Jeremiah, "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jer. 2:13). In Isaiah 44 God makes the promise, "For I will pour water on the thirsty land" (Isa. 44:3). In chapter 55 he declares, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!" (v. 1). Several times in the writings of Ezekiel and Zechariah there is a picture of a river of life flowing out from God's presence in Jerusalem (Ezek. 47:1-12; Zech. 13:1; 14:8). In the New Testament, in the Book of Revelation, there is a reference to these themes in the promises for the end time, "For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 7:17).

Much of the Old Testament is filled with this pictorial religious language revealing the thirst of the soul, a thirst that can be satisfied only by God. However, the woman chose to misunderstand Christ's words by taking them literally. She was blind because she would not see.

Jesus was claiming to be the One who alone can satisfy human longing. Have you tested his claim? You may try to fill your life with the things of this world—money, fame, power, activity—but though these will

satisfy for a time, they will not do so permanently. I have often said that they are like a Chinese dinner. They will fill you up well, but two or three hours later you will be hungry again. Only Jesus Christ is able to satisfy you fully.

A Springing Fountain

There is one more point that is of great importance to this study. Up to now we have been thinking mostly about the phrase "living water" from verse 10. Jesus said, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." This verse is important, but we must not overlook the point that four verses further on, in verse 14, Jesus repeats his offer with a significant variation. In verse 14 he says, "But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

No one has ever seen a well of water springing up. Only the water in a spring springs up. The water in a well just lies there. So Jesus is not talking about a well. The woman had come to a well. Jesus has invited her to a spring. Now he adds that if she allows him to place this spring within her, the spring will never cease but will continue to bubble away forever.

Imagine, if you will, that you have just purchased a piece of property upon which you are going to build a house. There is water on the property. If the water is in a well, the water will give you no trouble. If you are there with your bulldozers to clear the ground for your house, all you have to do is push some dirt into the hole and the well will be gone forever so far as you are concerned. It is entirely different, however, if the source of the water on your property is a spring. Try to do the same as you did with the well. You push some dirt over a spring, and it seems to be gone. Five o'clock comes. The workmen go home. But the next morning, when the workmen come back, the stream will be there again, having simply pushed its way through the ground. A well can be covered. A spring seeps through anything you may place over it.

This is what the Lord Jesus Christ is saying. He is promising to place a spring within the life of anyone who will come to him. This spring will be eternal, free, joyous, and self-dependent. But he is also warning you that you will never be able to bulldoze anything over it!

We try, of course. I have done it myself. I know of many who have believed in Christ but who have come to a place in their lives where his way seems inconvenient and who have tried to stifle his presence by piling some foreign substance over the spring. Some have said, "I'm glad that I'm saved, but I'm going to go my way while I'm young. I paid too much attention to religion in my youth. Now I'm just going to cover it up." So they try. But instead of succeeding they discover that God just comes bubbling through.

Let me ask another question: What happens when a spring comes bubbling through dirt? The answer is: It produces muddy water. Is it the spring's fault? No! The fault lies in the dirt that has been pushed on top of it. Does this describe your life? Are you a Christian who has run from God, trying to cover over his presence, but instead only had your life filled with muddy water? If this does describe you, why don't you allow the Lord Jesus Christ to remove the dirt and purify the spring of his life within you?

Let me warn you that you cannot go your own way indefinitely. You will never get away with that. God must be true to his character, and God says that in his holiness he is determined to perfect the image of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, within you. If God were to allow you to go any way you want and make a success of it, then he would be a liar when he says that Jesus Christ is the only way, the only truth, and the only life. God is no liar. So he will make a mess of your life, a ruin of your life, if he has to, until you come to the point where you will let him perfect that work in you he began when you first tasted of the Lord Jesus.

Will you yield to him? If you do, he will satisfy any longing that you may ever have had. He put it there in the first place. And he will do with you that which is pleasing in his sight and which will bless others.

Chapter 46.
Facing the Truth

John 4:15-18

Several years ago I heard of a person who had become a nominal Christian because, as he said, he was looking for an "easy" or "comfortable" religion. I was amused when I heard this, but also a bit saddened, for I knew that the person had never understood the first thing about himself or about true Christianity.

Millions of volumes have been written about Christianity, of course. But this should not obscure the fact that at the heart of the faith there is a great simplicity. Christianity presents a twofold revelation. There is the revelation of God, primarily in Jesus Christ; and there is the revelation of ourselves. The two are related. Thus, no one has ever seen God unless at the same time he has seen himself to be a sinner. This has been the experience of all who have seen him—Moses, Isaiah, David, Peter, who, when they saw God, immediately confessed their sin. Conversely, no one has ever really seen himself unless God has been present to reveal the true state of his heart to him.

Another way of saying the same thing is this. Christianity begins by bringing people to the truth about their own depraved condition, but it does so to convince them of their need of Jesus Christ and to prepare them for understanding who he is and what he has accomplished for them by his death and resurrection.

Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17). It is only when you and I have recognized the nature of sin and its gravity that we will come to the One who is our soul's physician.

Guilt Exposed

The fact that we all need to recognize our sin and its gravity does not only lie at the heart of some abstract presentation of Christianity, however. It also lies at the heart of some of the most concrete of the biblical stories. In fact, in the story of the encounter of Jesus Christ with the woman of Samaria, which we are now studying, it is both the heart and turning point of the narrative.

Up to verse 15 of the fourth chapter, in which the story is told, much had been said both by the woman and by Jesus, but we cannot feel that any of it has really touched the woman deeply. It is true that Jesus, a Jew, had spoken to her first and so surprised one who had never known anything but scorn from her Jewish neighbors. Still her reaction was not much more than surprise. It is also true that Jesus had aroused her curiosity by offering her a new type of water, "living water," which would be a spring of water within her "welling up to eternal life." But even this offer must have been received light-heartedly and perhaps even humorously by the woman.
It was an amusing game, this verbal byplay with the interesting Jew, but it was not serious. Presumably the woman even continued to go about preparing to lower her bucket into the well to draw water.

Suddenly Jesus jolted her to her senses with a single sentence. It was not unkind; everything he said to the woman *was* kind. Still it was a sentence that must have hit the poor woman like a sudden slap in the face and at once have exposed her most serious failing and deep guilt. Jesus said, "Go, call your husband and come back" (v. 16).

At once the woman was recalled to her failure. "I have no husband," she said. She wanted to end that line of discussion as soon as possible.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true" (vv. 17-18). At this point all the woman's pretentions vanished completely, and, although she tried twice thereafter to change the subject (vv. 20 and 25), she knew that all her thoughts and actions were exposed before this man who was able to tell her all that she had ever done.

Not Allegory

It has been held quite widely by a number of New Testament scholars—perhaps in some cases to avoid the implications of Christ's supernatural insight and divinity—that the reference to the five husbands may be allegory; in fact, that the entire story may be allegorical. The basis for this theory lies in the fact that according to 2 Kings 17:29-31, when the original inhabitants of Samaria were exiled by the Assyrians in 721 B.C., people from five different places (each with their own gods) were brought in to replace them. According to this view, the woman would stand for Samaria. The five husbands would stand for the five false gods to whom, it could be said, the Samaritans had married themselves. The sixth man, to whom they were not legally married, would stand for Jehovah whom the Samaritans worshiped, but ignorantly.

This ingenious theory does not bear scrutiny. Thus, the teaching of the story about Christ's supernatural insight and the sinfulness of men and women stands.

In the first place, although it is true that people from five different cities are mentioned in 2 Kings 17:29-31, the fact is that when the gods of these people are mentioned in the same verses, it is not five that are listed but seven. The allegory breaks down at its most significant point. Second, as Leon Morris points out in his commentary, the false gods that are mentioned in 2 Kings were not introduced one after another, as the husbands would be, but were worshiped simultaneously. Third, it is inconceivable that John the evangelist would picture Jesus as speaking of the five false gods as legitimate husbands, while referring to Jehovah as the One with whom the people were living in adultery. The whole of the biblical tradition, which John knew, would reverse that.

No, the situation was real, and Jesus actually saw into the heart of the Samaritan woman. Do you realize that he also sees into your heart? It does not matter what your sin is—whether it is the sin of this woman, that of Moses, David, Peter, or merely the disobedience and rebellion that lurks in each of us. The Bible tells us that "nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before

the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13). He sees your heart. He knows all that you have done. Will you accept this? Will you acknowledge your sin before him? If you will, then God has already taken the first step necessary to bring you to him.

All Have Sinned

I know, as I say this, that for many the thought of sin is distasteful. Sin is unpopular, and Christians are often criticized for dwelling too much upon it. This is not because Christians love sin, however. It is simply because Christians are realists. They recognize that sin is an everyday experience and the number one problem of mankind. What is more, they recognize that the Bible everywhere insists upon this.

"The Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin," writes Paul (Gal. 3:22). In 1 Kings 8, the chapter that contains King Solomon's great prayer at the dedication of the temple, Solomon declares, "There is no one who does not sin" (v. 46). David wrote, "They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good" (Ps. 14:1). Psalm 143:2 declares, "No one living is righteous before you." Isaiah observed, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). In the New Testament, in the first letter of the apostle John, we are admonished, "If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives" (1 John 1:10).

This is also the burden of the first chapters of Paul's letter to the Romans. It is here, in fact, that we find the doctrine of the universality of man's sin stated in its most comprehensive form. Like a doctor's diagnosis these chapters probe man's spiritual illness; they conclude by declaring that all are incurably sick and that there is no hope for anyone apart from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in his atonement.

According to these chapters there are three types of men. The first type is what we would today call a hedonist, the man whose basis for life is materialism. Paul discusses him in Romans 1:1832. The hedonist does not acknowledge any standard other than those of his own making.

Consequently, he has determined to live for his own enjoyment and for whatever extraordinary pleasures he can find. "Why is this man a sinner?" Paul asks. "He is a sinner because he is on a path that is leading him away from God and therefore away from any real beauty, truth, or inner satisfaction." As Paul describes it, this path is marked by empty imaginings, darkened intellects, a profession of wisdom by one who is actually foolish, and finally a perversion of the worship of God that leads to a final abasement of man (vv. 21-23). In finding contemporary examples we do not have to look very far into the world around us.

What should a person do if he has been driving down a road to some destination but has taken a wrong turn? If he knows the country thoroughly, he could try to cut over to where he should be. But if he knew the country that well, he would not have been lost in the first place. Normally the only thing to do is to turn around and go back. It is the same spiritually. Some persons go very carefully down the path I have just been describing and never get far. Others abandon all caution and get quite far along, like the Samaritan woman. But the cure for each is the same. Each must first stop. This is known as repentance. Then he or she must turn around. This is conversion. And the person must go back. The hedonist is a sinner because the way he is taking leads him from God.

The second type of person, the type discussed in Romans 2:1-16, is what we would call a moral man. In Paul's day this was the Greek philosopher or professor of ethics. In our day it would be anyone who has high ethical standards but who does not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. Most people think of themselves in this category.

Why does God consider this person a sinner? The answer has two parts. First, he is a sinner because he has come short of perfection, which is God's standard of righteousness. It is the standard of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only perfect human being who ever lived. Second, he is a sinner because he falls short of his own standards, no matter how high or low they may be.

Let me ask you this question. You probably do not consider yourself a hedonist. You consider yourself a moral person. Well, what is your standard of morality? You may say, "My standard is the Sermon on the Mount. Isn't that a good standard?" Yes, that is a good standard, but the question is not whether or not the Sermon on the Mount is a good standard. The question is: Do you live up to it? In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Are you perfect? Of course not! In that case, you are condemned by the standard of your own choosing.

You may not like that conclusion, of course. So you may say, "Well, I'll just lower my standard, if that is what the Sermon on the Mount involves. I'll make my standard the Golden Rule—'Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.'" Well, do you keep that standard? Do you always do to other people all that you would like done by them to yourself? Once again, the answer is no! So even the Golden Rule condemns you.

The point is that all of us are condemned by whatever standard we may erect, for none of us is able to live up to even the lowest standards of morality completely and consistently. We are all sinners, and deep within we know it. It is interesting and quite relevant that it was a recognition of these facts—that there are standards and that all men break them—that led as a first step to the conversion of C. S. Lewis, who began as an atheist and agnostic but became the most brilliant Christian apologist of our century.

There is one more type of person, however. Paul describes him in Romans 2:17-29. This is the man who would admit most if not all of what I have been saying and yet who would attempt to escape the conclusions by maintaining his faith in religion. "I have been baptized," he would say. "I am confirmed. I have given large sums of money to the church's support and served on its committees." "Well, good for you," Paul answers, "but you are still a sinner."

"Me, a sinner? Why?"

"Because God requires a complete perfection, including a change of the heart," Paul answers, "and none of the outward accouterments of religion—church membership, the sacraments, service, or stewardship —can do anything about it."

In the city of Basel, Switzerland, where I lived for three years, there is a carnival each year called *Fashnacht.* It is much like the Mardi Gras that is celebrated in predominantly Catholic countries or Catholic areas of a country, but it is held during the first week of Lent instead of before it, presumably to show that Basel is Protestant. Whatever the case, *Fashnacht* certainly does not show the city to be Christian in the biblical sense, for the carnival is always a time of riotous behavior in which the normally restrained and stolid Baselers let themselves go morally. Everyone knows what goes on. There are even jokes about it. But no one knows precisely who is doing what because the revelers wear masks. Each year during *Fashnacht,* however, the Salvation Army makes an attempt to challenge people to a higher standard of conduct by placing large posters around the city bearing the German inscription "Gott sieht hinter deine Maske." This means, "God sees behind your mask." The point is that God knows what is going on within and who is doing it.

The Lord Jesus Christ is looking into your heart and mind. What does he see? Does he see all that you have done and are doing, unconfessed and demanding his judgment? Must he say of you, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Rom. 3:10-12)? And is there no more to say? Or can he look at you as one who is indeed a sinner, but whose sin has been judged in his death and who now stands before him clothed in God's own righteousness?

This is the gospel. All have indeed "sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). But "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

The Invitation

I know that, as a result of this study, there may be some who have seen something of their own sinfulness, and I know that the first reaction upon seeing one's sin is to back off in despair. "If I am really so sinful," a person asks, "how can God love me? How can he have anything to do with me?" If you are saying that, I must not close without showing you one more phrase in Christ's words to the Samaritan woman. What did Jesus say to the woman? He said, "Go, call your husband"—that is true; it was an attempt to establish her sinfulness—but he finished the sentence by saying, "But when you have done that come back again."

"Go, call your husband." That was a word for her conscience. "Come back again." That was a word for her heart.

In the same way he speaks to you. You must see your need. You need to face the truth about your own condition. Yet you must also hear his warm invitation. "Come to me" (Matt. 11:28). The way is open. Say, "Yes, I am coming, Lord Jesus."

Chapter 47.
Salvation Is of the Jews

John 4:19-22

I do not know what Emily Post, Amy Vanderbilt, or Miss Manners would have thought of the Lord Jesus Christ if they had been living in the first Christian century and had heard him teaching the people and speaking to them. But I am sure that if they had overheard his conversation with the woman of Samaria, which we have been studying, at one point at least they would all have pronounced him bigoted and intolerable. Jesus had spoken to the woman of Samaria about her sin, reminding her that she was living with a man to whom she was not married, and this would be bad enough to one who thinks first of all of etiquette. But then, after the woman had obviously and politely tried to change the subject by asking the Lord's opinion on the rival Jewish and Samaritan claims about God and the forms of proper

worship, Jesus actually claimed that in his day at least the Jewish way of worship was the only valid one and that the Samaritans knew nothing spiritually.

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem" (vv. 19-20). She was about to go on by asking which way was correct but Jesus anticipated her, interrupting. He said, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews" (vv. 21-22).

If the question of the woman were asked in our day, no doubt many would attempt to sidestep it. Many preachers and even many theologians would answer by some vague appeal to ecumenicity or to the general areas of agreement among most of the world's religions. Some would be embarrassed. Jesus took none of these approaches. Instead of dodging the question or merely attempting to be polite, Jesus spoke forcefully, acknowledging that the Jews had filled a unique place in the history of salvation—in fact, that there was no salvation apart from them—but then pointing to the day when all national distinctions would pass away and when men and women would worship God in spirit and in truth on the basis of faith in his death and resurrection.

Why did he say this? To understand why Jesus answered as he did is to understand the way of salvation more perfectly and to move away from all forms of human religion—whether of Jew or Gentile—toward a true religion based on God's grace.

Rival Religions

Before we can come to this point, however, we need to understand something of the rivalry that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. About 750 years before Christ's conversation with the woman, when the northern half of the Jewish nation, the nation of Israel, had been carried off into captivity by the Assyrians, the

conquering people had moved other people back into the area to resettle it. This move is described in the Old Testament in 2 Kings 17, where we are also told that the settlers were sent out from the five city-kingdoms of Babylon, Cuth, Hamath, Ava, and Sepharah.

It is not possible to transport an entire population, of course. So the result was that some Jewish people remained. Perhaps they had hidden in caves, bribed their captors, or escaped captivity. Almost at once these Jews began to intermarry with the newcomers, thereby producing a race that was partially Jewish and partially Assyrian. For the orthodox Jew this was an almost unforgivable sin. It was, in fact, forbidden in the Old Testament. Therefore, in the eyes of the pure-blooded Jews who remained in the southern kingdom of Judah, those who remained in the north actually lost their right to be considered Jews at all and forfeited their heritage.

In time the same type of defeat that had resulted in the captivity of the northern kingdom also befell the south. The southern Jews did not lose their identity, however. For seventy years they were held in captivity by the Babylonians. Nevertheless, when the exiles returned from Babylon at the end of that period and began to rebuild their city and its temple, they were still Jewish and were proud of their heritage. Perhaps for this reason and perhaps also because of the teaching of the law, the southern Jews refused help in rebuilding the temple when such help was offered to them by the Samaritans in about 450 B.C. In anger the Samaritans then built their own temple on Mount Gerizim in Samaria, contrary to the law. This was the temple to which the Samaritan woman referred. Eventually this became a rival temple, and the religion of the Samaritans became a rival religion.

What was the status of this temple? What was the status of the Samaritan faith? These were the questions at issue, and it was these that Jesus was answering.

In answering them it is interesting that Jesus did not stress racial superiority. There could be no question of racial pride simply because Jesus was in Samaria to win the Samaritans.

Nevertheless, the Samaritan religion was a man-made religion, and Jesus would not allow the Samaritan woman to believe that any religion of human origin, a religion based on human ideas, is acceptable to Jehovah. Human religion was not acceptable then, and it is not acceptable today. Accordingly, salvation was of the Jews alone because only the Jews possessed a religion that had its origin in God. Moreover, it was only in Judaism, with its system of sacrifices and temple worship that there was any true sense of the holiness of God and of the necessity of a substitutionary sacrifice as the grounds of forgiveness and of an acceptable approach to him.

Since this is a difficult point, let me say it again in other terms. Salvation is always of God's grace, not of human merit; and since grace was offered to the sinner on the grounds of the death of an atoning sacrifice and since in Christ's time that sacrifice could only be offered at Jerusalem by a legitimate priest, a descendant of Aaron, it is obvious that there could be no salvation for anyone except through the Jewish priesthood which in turn was available only to a circumcised member of one of the tribes of Israel. Jesus was impressing this upon the woman, thereby reasserting the right of God to establish the means of approach to him and encouraging her to turn from any trust in human religions.

Gentile Salvation

I do not know whether the record of the conversation between Jesus and the woman of Samaria that we have in John 4 is the whole of the conversation. It may be only an attenuated version. But I do know that if Jesus had gone on to explain these truths to the woman, he could have drawn on three great examples from the Old Testament.

The first example he could have drawn upon was Ruth. Ruth was a Moabitess, a foreigner who had been married to the son of a Jewish woman named Naomi. She had met her husband in Moab, where Naomi and her sons had gone during a period of famine in Israel. The sons had died, and when Naomi decided to return to her own land Ruth, her daughter-in-law, determined to go with her. Ruth had apparently learned

from Naomi during the years they were together, and she had come to worship Naomi's God. At first Naomi tried to persuade Ruth to remain in Moab, but Ruth would have none of it. Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16). These are beautiful words, but I am afraid that the beauty of the words has kept many persons from noticing the far more important ordering of the thought. Ruth wanted to join Naomi in the true worship of Jehovah. But notice, she could not say "Your God will be my God" until she had first said "Your people will be my people." In her statement Ruth confessed her need for a change in nationality before there could be a change in her God.

A second example of this truth can be seen in the account of Naaman, the Syrian. He was a general of the most powerful state of his day. He was strong and respected. There is no reason to think that he was any less ruthless than any other military commander. He was feared. Yet he was also pitied, for somewhere along the way he had contracted leprosy, and there was no known cure.

Through a young Jewish slave girl, who had doubtlessly been captured during one of his raids, Naaman learned of the existence in Israel of Elisha who (he had been told) could cure him. He went to Palestine. But when Elisha refused even to come out to meet him and instead merely sent him word that he was to wash himself seven times in the Jordan, all the national pride of the general rose to the surface, and he expressed his scorn of the muddy river that could not even begin to compare, he said, with the beautiful rivers of his country. As he cooled down, however, a servant helped him to change his mind. "It's worth a try," the servant argued. "If Elisha had asked for a ton of gold, you would have given him that. Why not dip in the river? Try it. You've come a long way. It will cost you nothing." Naaman did and was cured.

Now, however, there follows the significant part of the story. Naaman did something strange. He asked for several sacks of dirt. Naaman explained, "Please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair

of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the Lord" (2 Kings 5:17).

Think what that means! We must imagine that the work is done and the caravan of horses with their riders, followed by the mules with their burden of dirt, returns to Syria. Word runs ahead that Naaman is returning and that he is cured of leprosy. There is a joyous reception when the travelers arrive. But then, before the night comes and Naaman retires, the dirt that has been brought from Israel is poured into a frame made to receive it, and Naaman takes his place upon the earth of Palestine to pray to Jehovah—a Gentile who is willing to come as a Jew, relying on the same grace that was shown by the Jews' God when he healed him.

The final story comes from Esther. It reveals the same truth. In Esther's day there had been a dirty little bit of anti-Semitism that arose because Haman, a high Persian official, hated a Jew named Mordecai. Esther, the adopted daughter of Mordecai, intervened, and the gallows built for Mordecai by Haman bore Haman's body instead. The people were saved. It was a great day, and there was much rejoicing. It was also a great demonstration of the power of the Jews' God to preserve them, and this fact caused many of the Persians to believe on him: "And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them" (Esther 8:17). What does that mean? It is simply the Old Testament's way of saying that many of the Persians were saved. They became Jews, being admitted to one of the Jewish tribes, and then were permitted to bring their sacrifices to a Jewish priest and to receive God's forgiveness on the ground of the death of the substitute.

Salvation for All

These three examples are enough to show that Jesus was entirely in line with the Old Testament tradition when he declared that before his time the Gentiles had to become Jews in order to be saved. But we must not overlook the fact that at the same time that he was reaffirming these truths, Jesus also predicted a change that was to come shortly. It is true that salvation was of the Jews, but soon the offer of salvation was to be

broadened to include all persons—Jews and Gentiles—and the way of approach was to be revealed as faith in the only complete and perfect sacrifice that he alone would provide by dying for sinners.

God did not nullify his promises to Israel. He fulfilled them in Christ. Thus, the day came when the long period of preparation with its sacrifices and temple worship came to an end. At the very moment when Christ died there was an earthquake. The veil of the temple, which had divided the holy place of the temple from the Holy of Holies, through which only the high priest could pass—and that only once a year on the Day of Atonement—was torn in two from top to bottom. Thus God signified that henceforth he was done with sacrifices. The final sacrifice, Jesus of Nazareth, had been offered. The priesthood, too, was ended. Now only Christ was high priest. Even the temple was superceded, for now the only way to God was through Jesus.

Do you believe these things? If you do, you are today among those who can come boldly to the throne of grace through Jesus Christ and can find grace to help in your need. You do not have to make a pilgrimage to present your sacrifice. You do not need to change your race. All that you have to do is abandon your own efforts to obtain salvation and come to God by faith in him who declared himself to be the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). If you do, you will find him to be all that the Scriptures declared him to be. He is the Son of God—the Savior.

To Jew and Gentile

The Christian belief that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah who fulfilled all to which the sacrifices pointed cannot be entirely acceptable to those who are steeped in the Jewish religion and who wish to retain their Judaism. Nothing but a sellout to a watered-down doctrine of universalism will make the Christian religion universally popular. But at the same time Jewish people must recognize that apart from Jesus Christ and under the Old Testament laws, there is no way in this day for me, a Gentile, to approach the Holy One of Israel. To do that I would have to abandon my own nationality and then be initiated into one of

the twelve tribes of Israel (which is impossible because their identity has been lost). I would then have to bring a lamb as an atonement for my sin to the high priest (who no longer exists) and have it sacrificed by him on the altar of a temple in Jerusalem at a site now occupied by a Mohammedan mosque.

There is no other way of salvation for a Gentile under the teaching of the Old Testament.
Salvation is of the Jews. So if Jesus is not the Messiah, the one through whom the blessing of Abraham is to come upon the nations, the *goyim*, then today all who cannot bring their sacrifices are lost. The veil still hangs before the holy presence of Jehovah; the wall of partition between the Jew and Gentile still stands. It is only through Jesus' shed blood, the blood of the perfect sacrifice, to which all the Old Testament sacrifices point, that I stand cleansed and spotless before God. It is only through him that I share with the believing Jew a vital and transforming access to God's presence.

At the same time the Gentiles must be reminded that the fact that Jesus was a Jew is itself a great and definitive blow against all anti-Jewish prejudice. Moreover, the fact that he endorsed the Old Testament must draw me toward it. To love the Lord Jesus Christ more is to love the Jew more.
It is to rejoice in God's continued and evident blessing upon the Jews, to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and to look for the time when (according to the prophetic books of the Bible) God will again use the Jews to bring new and added blessing upon the nations.

Chapter 48.
How to Worship God

John 4:23-24

Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life."

These words by the noted Swiss theologian Karl Barth undoubtedly find an echo in the hearts of all who truly know God and earnestly desire to serve him, regardless of their opinion of Barth's theology. But in spite of the obvious truth that the worship of God is an important and even urgent imperative for Christians, it is a sad fact that in our day much that passes for worship is not worship at all, and many who sincerely desire to worship do not always know how to go about it or where to begin. "What is worship anyway?" some ask. "Who can worship? Where can one worship? How does one worship?" ask others.

One Bible student has written: "Thanks to our splendid Bible societies and to other effective agencies for the dissemination of the Word, there are today many millions of people who hold 'right opinions,' probably more than ever before in the history of the church. Yet I wonder if there was ever a time when true spiritual worship was at a lower ebb. To great sections of the church the art of worship has been lost entirely, and in its place has come that strange and foreign thing called the 'program.' This word has been borrowed from the stage and applied with sad wisdom to the type of public service which now passes for worship among us."

Are these words true, even in part? Are the questions I have just repeated genuine? If so, there is an answer for them all in the words of Jesus. Jesus said, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24).

Worship Is Essential

Before we begin to look at these words in detail, however, we must first of all see that worship itself is an important subject and that these are important verses for dealing with it.

There are several ways of showing this. For instance, in Philippians 3:3 the apostle Paul speaks of worship as one of the three great marks that reveal the presence of the new nature within the Christian. He writes: "For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh." Most Christians would quickly acknowledge the last of these points. It is a question of holding to the true gospel. Many would also think highly of the second point, for joy is important. It is a mark of the Spirit, according to the fifth chapter of Galatians. I strongly suspect, however, that not many think of the worship of God as a mark of the presence of the new nature within. Yet in this verse it is included along with the other essentials.

Another way of making this point is to note that there are three great "musts" in John's Gospel. The first "must" occurs in 3:7, where Jesus says, "you *must be* born again." The second "must" is in verse 14 of the same chapter. There Jesus says, "The Son of Man *must* be lifted up." The verses we are studying give us the third "must," for they tell us that all who worship God "*must* worship in spirit and in truth." These three great doctrines—the necessity for the new birth, the necessity of Christ's death, and the necessity of true worship—belong together.

Perhaps it is not even irrelevant to point out that this is the major passage in which John deals with the nature and necessity of worship, for of the thirteen uses of the words "worship" or "worshiper" in John's Gospel, ten of them occur in this section, and it is only here that worship is actually discussed and defined.

Spiritual Worship

What is worship? Part of the answer is to be seen in the fact that if you and I had been living in England during the days of the early formation of the English language, between the period of
Geoffrey Chaucer and William Shakespeare, we would not have used the word "worship" at all. We would have said "worth-ship," and we would have meant that in worshiping God we were assigning to God his

true worth. Philologically speaking, this is the same thing as "praising" God or "glorifying" his name.

If someone should ask the two most important questions that follow from that definition, however—namely, "What is God's true worth?" and "How do we become aware of it?"—we are immediately brought to the heart of Christ's words to the Samaritan woman. For Jesus said that those who acknowledge God's true worth must do so "in spirit and in truth." In other words, they must do so "in truth" because truth has to do with what his nature is, and they must do so "in spirit" because they can only apprehend it spiritually.

Let me explain that a bit further. Many persons have been led astray in thinking that when Jesus spoke of "spirit" in this verse he was speaking of the Holy Spirit. I do not believe that this is the case. There is a sense, of course, in which we only come to worship God after the Holy Spirit has been at work in our hearts moving us to do so. But in this verse Jesus is not speaking of that. He is speaking of spirit generally (without the definite article), not *the* Holy Spirit, and he is teaching that in the age he was inaugurating by his death and resurrection the place of worship would not matter, for a man or a woman would not worship merely by being in the right place and doing certain right things. He would worship in his spirit, which could be anywhere.

I can make this even clearer by placing it in the context of the three parts of man's nature. Man is a trinity. He has a body, soul, and spirit. Jesus is saying that nothing is true worship of God except what takes place in man's spirit.

Many people worship with the body. This means that they consider themselves to have worshiped if they have been in the right place doing the right things at the right time. In Christ's day the woman thought this meant being either in Jerusalem, at the temple there, or on Mount Gerezim at the Samaritans' temple. In our day this would refer to people who think they have worshiped God simply because they have occupied a seat in a church on Sunday morning, or sung a hymn, or lit a candle, or crossed themselves, or knelt in the aisle. Jesus says this is not

worship. These customs may be vehicles for worship. In some cases they may also hinder it. But they are not worship in themselves. Therefore, we must not confuse worship with the particular things we do on Sunday morning.

In addition, however, we must not confuse worship with feeling, for worship does not originate with the soul any more than it originates with the body. The soul is the seat of our emotions. It may be the case, and often is, that the emotions are stirred in real worship. At times tears fill the eyes or joy floods the heart. But, unfortunately, it is possible for these things to happen and still no worship to be there. It is possible to be moved by a song or by oratory and yet not come to a genuine awareness of God and a fuller praise of his ways and nature.

True worship occurs only when that part of man, his spirit, which is akin to the divine nature (for God is spirit), actually meets with God and finds itself praising him for his love, wisdom, beauty, truth, holiness, compassion, mercy, grace, power, and all his other attributes. William Barclay has written on this point, "The true, the genuine worship is when man, through his spirit, attains to friendship and intimacy with God. True and genuine worship is not to come to a certain place; it is not to go through a certain ritual or liturgy; it is not even to bring certain gifts. True worship is when the spirit, the immortal and invisible part of man, speaks to and meets with God, who is immortal and invisible."

Liturgy

Incidentally, the truth that we are to worship God in spirit also has bearing upon the question of the various types of liturgy used in Christian churches, for it means that, with the exception of liturgical elements that suggest wrong doctrine, there is no liturgy that in itself is either inherently better or worse than another. For any given congregation, one type of service will presumably be more valuable than another. But the decision regarding what that type of service will be ought to be arrived at—not by asking whether one likes emotional or nonemotional hymns, extemporaneous or read prayers, congregational responses or silence—in short, whether one prefers Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, or Quaker services—but by asking how effective the service is in turning the attention of the worshiper away from the service itself to God. In this respect an order of worship is to be evaluated on the same basis that we use to evaluate the preacher.

In thinking through this particular issue I have been helped by the concepts of C. S. Lewis. Lewis was a member of the Church of England and was accustomed to various forms of what we generally call a "liturgical" service. Nevertheless, Lewis did not plead for liturgy. He asked merely for what he called "uniformity," on the grounds that "novelty" in the worship service at best turns our attention to the novelty but may actually turn it to the one who is enacting the liturgy.

Lewis wrote, "As long as you notice, and have to count the steps, you are not yet dancing but only learning to dance. A good shoe is a shoe you don't notice. Good reading becomes possible when you need not consciously think about eyes, or light, or print, or spelling. The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God." We should pray that God will use any form of church service in which we happen to be participating to that great and essential end.

Worship in Truth

Finally, we need to notice that the true worship of God is a worship not only in spirit but in truth. What does that mean? What does it mean to worship God "in truth"?

First, it means that we must approach God *truthfully*, that is, honestly or wholeheartedly. That is what Jesus was referring to in a negative way when he said of the people of his day, "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ...they worship me in vain" (Matt. 15:8-9). According to Jesus, no worship is true worship unless there is an honesty of heart on the part of the worshiper. We must not pretend to worship. We must worship truthfully, knowing that our hearts are open books before God.

Second, we must worship on the basis of the *biblical revelation.* This is also implied in the verses I have just quoted. For the verse that begins "They worship me in vain" immediately goes on to condemn those who have substituted "rules taught by men" for the doctrines of Scripture. "Your word is truth," says the Scripture (John 17:17). So if we are to worship "in truth," as God commands us to do, our worship must be in accord with the principles and admonitions of this book.

When the Protestant Reformation first took place under Martin Luther in the early sixteenth century and the doctrines and principles of the Word of God, long covered over by the traditions and encrustations of ceremony of the medieval church, again came forth into prominence, there was an immediate elevation of the Word of God in Protestant services. Calvin particularly carried this out with thoroughness, ordering that the altars (long the center of the Latin mass) be removed from the churches and that a pulpit with a Bible upon it be placed in the center of the building. This was not to be on one side of the room, but in the very center, where every line of the architecture would carry the gaze of the worshiper to the Book that alone contains the way of salvation and outlines the principles upon which the church of the living God is to be governed.

Finally, to approach God "in truth" also means that we must approach God Christocentrically. This means "in Christ," for this is God's way of

approach to him. Jesus himself signified this when he said to his disciples, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). This is a difficult point for many to accept, of course. But it is precisely because of the difficulty that God has taken such pains to teach that this is the way of approach to him. We see this even in the Old Testament in the instructions given to Moses for the design of the Jewish temple.

What was the original tabernacle? It was not an edifice of great beauty or permanence. It had no stained-glass windows, no great arches. It was made of pieces of wood and animal skins. Nevertheless every part of it was significant. The tabernacle taught the way to God. Take that tabernacle with its altar for sacrifice, its laver for cleansing, its Holy Place, and its Holy of Holies, and you have a perfect illustration of how a person must approach God. The altar, which is the first thing we come to, is the cross of Christ. It was given to teach that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins and to direct attention to the Lamb of God who should come to take away the sins of the world. The laver, which comes next, is a picture of cleansing, which Christ also provides when we confess our sins and enter into fellowship with him. The table of shewbread, which was within the Holy Place, speaks of Christ as the bread of life. The altar of incense is a picture of prayer, for we grow by prayer as well as by feeding on Christ in Bible study. Behind the altar of incense was the great veil, dividing the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. This was the veil torn in two at the moment of Christ's death to demonstrate that his death was the fulfillment of all these figures and the basis of the fullness of approach to the Almighty. Finally, within the Holy of Holies was the ark of the covenant with its mercy seat upon which the high priest placed the blood of the lamb once a year on the Day of Atonement. There, symbolized by the space above the mercy seat, was the presence of God into whose presence we can now come because of the great mercy of God revealed in the death of Christ for us.

There is no other way to come to God. To come through Christ—the Christ of the altar, laver, shewbread, incense, veil, and mercy seat—is to

come in truth. He is the truth. You must come in God's way and not in any way of human devising.

An Inexhaustible God

The wonder of Christian worship is that when we come to God in the way which he has established, we find him inexhaustible and discover that our desire to know and worship him further is increased. Bernard of Clairvaux was one who knew this. He wrote toward the middle of the twelfth century:

> Jesus, thou Joy of loving hearts,
> Thou Fount of life, thou Light of men,
> From the best bliss that earth imparts
> We turn unfilled to thee again.
>
> We taste thee, O thou living Bread,
> And long to feast upon thee still;
> We drink of thee, the Fountainhead,
> And thirst our souls from thee to fill.

When we so come, when we worship in that way, we find ourselves approaching what the compilers of the Westminster Shorter Catechism rightly described as the chief end of man. The catechism asks, "What is the chief end of man?" It answers, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him *forever.*"

Chapter 49.
"I Am He"

John 4:25-26

Did you ever stop to think that the character and accomplishments of a person can be summarized by the various names that are given to him during the course of his life? Or did you ever realize that it is sometimes possible to give a whole biography of a person through names alone?

Let me do this for the life of Julius Caesar, the great Roman general and emperor. The earliest name of Julius Caesar was Julius or Jules. As he grew older it would have been Julius Gaius, involving the family name. Titles were added that were earned throughout his career: soldier, general, quaestor, consul. He was elected Pontifex Maximus, Tribune, and Caesar. Finally, as the feeling of his contemporaries turned against him, Julius became an "ambitious ruler" and finally an "enemy of the people." A person who knows these titles as well as the details of how they were given to Caesar could easily sum up the whole career of the Roman emperor by means of them.

The same thing is true of the names of Jesus Christ. Only here the names are much more important. The names of Caesar are names given by men in recognition of his work. The names of Jesus are names given by God in order to reveal Christ's divine nature and the significance of his ministry. Thus, we know Jesus as the Word of God; the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world; the Son of God; the Son of man; the Savior; the Light of the world; the Lord; the Beloved; our great High Priest; the Conqueror; the King. Some of these titles have already been studied briefly in our survey of the first chapter of John's Gospel, where they occur. These are great names. No wonder Isaac Watts wrote in one of his hymns:

Join all the glorious names Of wisdom, love and power, That ever mortals knew, That angels ever bore: All are too mean to speak his worth, Too mean to set my Savior forth.

We come now to a name that is in some respects greater than them all.

"I AM THAT I AM"

We must remember at this point that Jesus had been talking to the woman of Samaria about her sin and of her need for "living water." She had tried to change the course of the conversation on several occasions, first by asking Jesus where it was that men and women ought to worship—in Jerusalem or in Samaria—and then by attempting to postpone any final commitments until the Messiah should come. The

woman said, "I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Jesus answered her briefly in one great sentence, "I who speak to you am he" (John 4:25-26). Apparently, this truth finally broke through to the woman's consciousness, and she left her water jar to go back to the city, calling, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (v. 29). The words of Jesus were undoubtedly the turning point in the woman's conversion.

Unfortunately, the full import of Christ's claim is obscured by the English translation. As we read the words, they seem to express no more than the claim: "Yes, I am the Messiah." That is important in itself, of course, and we shall come back to it. Nevertheless it is less than the words imply. Actually, the words are a tide. To be precise, Jesus did not really say, "I am *he*." The "he" has been added by the English translators. He simply said, "I am." The point of his claim is that the title "I am" was similar to, if not identical with, the great Old Testament name for God: Jehovah.

At this point we can understand why it is possible to call this title—"I am"—the greatest of all names for the Lord Jesus Christ. It is possible to understand why Paul wrote of him: "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil. 2:9-10). The name which is above all other names is "Lord," which means "Jehovah." This is in its turn an exact equivalent of the words "I am." This is God's own name. Thus, the name is above all earthly names, and it is at this name—Jehovah, Lord, "I am"—that all beings in heaven and earth shall bow.

How much of this registered with the woman of Samaria we do not know. We do know that several other times during his ministry Jesus used the words "I am" to refer to his deity. He once said to the Jews, "If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins" (John 8:24). That meant that they would not be saved unless they recognized that he was God. We also know that even the Jews themselves once took the word in this sense, for later in the same conversation, after Jesus had explained more clearly who he was and

had said, "Before Abraham was born, *I am*" (v. 58), we read that those listening to Jesus attempted to stone him for blasphemy.

In all, the claim of Christ to be the great "I am" occurs seven times in John's Gospel (in 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5), always as an expression of his claim to be God. And there are seven other very important instances in which the words are coupled with a noun describing him as the source of all good and the answer to all man's needs. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life" (6:35) ... "the light of the world" (8:12, 9:5) ... "the gate" (10:7, 9) ... "the good shepherd" (10:11, 14) ... "the resurrection and the life" (11:25) ... "the way and the truth and the life" (14:6) ... and "the true vine" (15:1, 5).

Obviously, not all of this was known to the woman or even could be known to her. Yet, the use of God's name—Jehovah—could not fail to be striking. "Can this be the Messiah?" she must have asked. "Is he a spokesman for God? Is he one who is so close to God that he can use God's name of himself?" No doubt she was pondering these questions as she went off to call others to the One "who told me everything I ever did."

The Messiah

Whatever may have been the woman's understanding of Christ's claim to be God—and she may have understood much more than we think—there can be no doubt that the woman fully understood that he was at the very least claiming to be the Messiah. The Samaritans were expecting the Messiah, as were the Jews. When the woman exclaimed, "When he comes, he will explain everything to us," she was probably thinking of the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah that is found in Deuteronomy 18:18. In that verse God told Moses of a coming prophet who should tell the people "all things."

Actually, in some ways the Samaritan expectation of the Messiah was purer than that of the Jews themselves, for it did not have the political overtones that the idea had in Judaism. Jesus was always careful not to admit to being the Messiah in the sense the Jews gave it. Although the

Samaritan view was imperfect, it was not false. They looked for a prophet. Thus, Jesus did accept the title when they gave it to him.

In Hebrew the word *mashiach,* which gives us the word "Messiah," means "the anointed one," as does the Greek word "Christ." This in turn refers to the fact that during certain periods of Old Testament history a man chosen by God for a special ministry was consecrated to that ministry by a ceremony in which his head was anointed with oil. That was the way in which kings were set apart for their royal office, for instance. To give one example, it was the way in which Samuel signified God's choice of the young shepherd boy, David, to be the future king, replacing the disobedient King Saul (1 Sam. 16:13; cf. 10:1). This was the way the high priests were installed in their offices (cf. Exod. 28:41). It was even true that on some occasions at least prophets were also anointed, for Elijah anointed his successor Elisha with oil before he himself was taken up into heaven (1 Kings 19:16). The anointed one—whether prophet, priest, or king— was a person set apart by God for a special task.

In time this general meaning of "messiah" acquired a more specific one, for God had promised to send a deliverer who would embody everything that the previous anointing could only faintly symbolize. He would be a great prophet, for he would fulfill God's words to Moses: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him" (Deut. 18:18). He would be a great priest, for he would present the perfect sacrifice for man's sin. Finally, he would be a great king, for he would reign forever on the throne of King David (2 Sam. 7:11-16).

A prophet! A priest! A king! This was what Jesus claimed in his conversation with the woman of Samaria. He claimed that all the promises concerning a deliverer of Israel and of the nations were fulfilled in him. He was the One for whom the human race had been waiting.

Two Genealogies

Either Jesus of Nazareth is God's Messiah, as he claimed to be, or else there will never be a Messiah. The evidence is in the two genealogies of Jesus found in Matthew and Luke, for according to these accounts, Jesus exhausts all messianic lines of descent from King David.

This proof of Jesus' messiahship has been set forth by many scholars, especially in the early centuries of church history. It has been stated since by James Orr of Scotland. Let me quote from a more recent and particularly lively statement by Donald Grey Barnhouse. "First... there [are] two genealogies. The lines [of descent] run parallel from Abraham to David, but then Matthew comes down to Jesus by way of Solomon, the son of David, while Luke comes down to Jesus by way of Nathan, the son of David. In other words, the two genealogies are the lines of two brothers and the children become cousins___The whole point of the difference lies in the fact that Solomon's line was the royal line and Nathan's line was the legal line.

"For example, the former king of England had an older brother, now the Duke of Windsor, who had a prior claim to the throne of Britain. Suppose that Windsor had been the father of a son by a real queen before he abdicated. It can readily be seen that such a child might be a strong pretender to the throne in case there was no other heir apparent. George VI is in the royal line for he has reigned; any child of Windsor might claim to be in a legal line. Nathan was the older brother of Solomon, but the younger brother took the throne. Nathan's line ran on through the years, and ultimately produced the virgin Mary. Solomon's line ran on through the years and ultimately produced Joseph. Matthew does not say that Joseph begat Jesus, but that he was the husband of Mary of whom was born Jesus (Matt. 1:16). And Luke uses a word for son that includes what we should call a son-in-law.

"But the greatest proof of all lies in one of the names in the account of Matthew: the name Jechonias. It is that name that furnishes the reason for the inclusion of the genealogy of Jesus' step-father, for it proves that Joseph could not have been the father of Jesus, or if he had been, that

Jesus could not have been the Messiah. In the use of that name there is conclusive evidence that Jesus is the son of Mary and not the son of Joseph. Jechonias was accursed of God with a curse that took the throne away from any of his descendants. 'Thus saith the Lord,' we read in Jeremiah 22:30, 'write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah.' Not one of the seven sons (1 Chron. 3:17-18) of this man ever possessed the throne. No carnal son of this man could have been king because of the curse of God. If Jesus had been the son of Joseph, he would have been accursed and could never have been the Messiah.

"On the other hand, the line of Nathan was not the royal line. A son of Heli would have faced the fact that there was a regal line that would have possessed the crown and would have contested any claim that came from the line of Nathan. How was the dilemma solved? It was solved in a manner that is so simple that it is the utter confusion of the agnostics who seek to tear the Bible to pieces. The answer is this: the line that had no curse upon it produced Heli and his daughter the virgin Mary and her son Jesus Christ. He is therefore eligible by the line of Nathan and exhausts that line. The line that had a curse on it produced Joseph and exhausts the line of Solomon, for Joseph's other children now have an elder brother who, legally, by adoption, is the royal heir. How can the title be free in any case? A curse on one line and the lack of reigning royalty in the other.

"But when God the Holy Spirit begat the Lord Jesus in the womb of the virgin without any use of a human father, the child that was born was the seed of David according to the flesh. And when Joseph married Mary and took the unborn child under his protecting care, giving him the title that had come down to him through his ancestor Solomon, the Lord Jesus became the legal Messiah, the royal Messiah, the uncursed Messiah, the true Messiah, the only possible Messiah. The lines are exhausted." Barnhouse concludes by observing that "any man that ever comes into this world professing to fulfill the conditions will be a liar and the child of the devil."

Is Jesus your Messiah? He is the only Messiah you will ever have. Come to him. Come to him now! If you do, you will find that he is able to give you new life and satisfy you fully.

A Lesson in Patience

Let me make one more point in closing: the name "Messiah" includes a lesson in patience. For it is a name that is linked to the expectations of those with whom God had been dealing for the thousands of years of Jewish history. When Adam and Eve sinned God came to them in grace, clothing them with skins and promising a deliverer who would come from the seed of the woman. They looked for the Messiah. God appeared to Abraham, promising that out of his loins would come one that should bring blessing to Israel and the nations. Abraham looked for the Messiah. God appeared to the prophets and through them repeated the promise to the Jewish people. They looked for the Messiah. In Christ's day people were still looking: Simeon, Anna, Elizabeth, and others. For all these long years there had been no fulfillment. It was only at the end of this period of waiting that God's Messiah actually came and fulfilled the promises given.

The great New Testament scholar B. F. Westcott has written: "It cannot have been for nothing that God was pleased to disclose his counsels, fragment by fragment, through long intervals of silence and disappointment and disaster. In that slow preparation for the perfect revelation of himself to men which was most inadequately apprehended till it was finally given, we discern the pattern of his ways. As it was in the case of the first advent, even so now he is guiding the course of the world to the second advent. We can see enough in the past, to find a vantage ground for faith; and, when the night is deepest and all sight fails, shall we not still *endure*, like the men of old time, *as seeing the invisible?*...

"By that title 'Christ' God teaches us to wait. ...By that title 'Christ' God teaches us to watch. ...By that title 'Christ' God teaches us to hope. It is the pledge of his personal love shown through all the ages. It is the pledge of the final establishment of his kingdom of which the sure

foundations are already laid. False hopes, selfish fancies, earthly ambitions were scattered by Christ's first coming. But he brought that into the world which gives their only reality to all the emblems of power. *Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.* Life if we look at it in Christ is transfigured: Death if we look at it in Christ is conquered. When we interpret what he has done through the church in preparation for his second coming by the light of what he did through Israel in preparation for his first coming, we can wait and watch and hope, certain of this in all checks and storms and griefs that he shall *reign till all enemies are put under his feet*."

If you will trust the Lord Jesus Christ as your Messiah and Savior, he will save you and will transform you into one who shows no anguish about an unknown future but instead shows forth a quiet confidence in God.

Chapter 50.
The Cry of New Life

John 4:27-30

It is not at all surprising that the disciples were amazed and bewildered when they returned from the city of Sychar to Jacob's well and found the Lord Jesus Christ talking with the Samaritan woman. According to their standards of conduct, this was highly irregular. It was bad enough that she was a woman. The rabbis had said, "Let no one talk with a woman in the street, no, not with his own wife." They had argued, "Each time that a man prolongs conversation with a woman he causes evil to himself, desists from the law, and in the end inherits Gehinnom." But beyond this, in addition to being a woman, the person to whom Jesus was talking was a looseliving Samaritan, a sinner. And the disciples knew, as did everybody, that "Jews do not associate with Samaritans."

This was more than ample ground for the surprise and bewilderment that John tells us overtook the disciples. But the amusing part of the story is in the fact that the disciples would have been far more surprised and bewildered if they had been able to see what had taken place in the life of the woman as a result of the Lord's conversation with her.

Rebirth

What had happened was that the woman had been born again. She is the first clear example in the Gospel. She had come down the hill a child of Adam's race, thinking only of the life she had known and of her very mundane need for more water. Instead she had met the second Adam, Jesus, who had filled her with a desire for a quality of life that she had never dreamed of and who had revealed himself to her as the One through whom that life is imparted to men and women. As a result of Christ's words the woman believed on him and became his witness.

How do we know that the woman of Samaria had been born again? We know it because of the changes that took place in her. Sometime ago I was reading a book on childbirth that included within it a partial listing of the changes that take place in a baby's life during the first few seconds after its birth. I am told that there are dozens of these changes. To begin with, eyes that have previously been accustomed to darkness must adjust themselves to the light. A body that was used to temperatures of nearly 100 degrees Fahrenheit within the mother must adapt to temperatures approximately 20 degrees lower. The circulation of the infant's blood changes, no longer flowing through the umbilical cord, as it did when the child was in the womb, but instead flowing through the lungs. A valve in the heart, which had been open until birth, must close permanently so that the used blood and fresh blood circulating through the heart will not mingle. Lungs must fill with air and begin their lifelong function. These and many other changes involving the nose, throat, digestive tract, and skin, must all take place within a few seconds of birth if the baby is to live its new life and be healthy.

In the same way, there are certain changes that must take place within the life of the one who has been born again spiritually. These took place in the life of the Samaritan woman, and since they took place we know that she was converted. These changes must also occur in the life of those who are born again in our day. If they do not take place, there are grounds for questioning whether the birth from above has occurred.

Confession of Christ

The first thing that the doctor or nurses attending upon the birth of the baby want to hear is a cry. The cry of the child is evidence to the doctors that air has entered the lungs and that the baby has begun to breathe. This is the same spiritually. When a man or a woman is born again, the first thing that any Christian should desire to hear is the cry of new life, evidence that the breath of God has come into the person.

This is why the Bible speaks in many places about the need for a public confession of faith in Jesus Christ. It is not true that the birth of the child of God depends upon the outward confession, as if a person needs to confess Christ before God will receive him into his family. It is rather the other way around. We confess because we have been born again. At the same time it is equally untrue that a confession of Jesus Christ is optional. Some persons think that they can be secret believers, but the Word of God never considers this a possibility. What does the Word of God say? "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven" (Matt. 10:32-33). "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Rom. 10:9-10).

It is at this point that we find the greatest contrast between Nicodemus, whose story is told in John 3, and the woman of Samaria, whose story is told here in chapter 4. So far as any human being could judge, Nicodemus was, of the two persons, the one who was most interested in spiritual things. He came to Jesus, after all; the woman did not come.

Christ *sought* the woman. Nicodemus asked Christ the first question; the woman was approached by Jesus. Nicodemus actually asked how one could be saved, while the woman apparently tried to avoid the same point when it was involved in Christ's questions. To all appearances Nicodemus was the more sincere and spiritually oriented person. Yet there is not the slightest evidence that he actually believed, while the woman showed her faith in every aspect of her speech and conduct.

Nicodemus had heard a great sermon on the new birth, but there was no personalized confession. We see him twice more in John's Gospel, but again the same statement is true. In chapter 7 we are told how the Jewish leaders were plotting to take Christ's life. Nicodemus intervened, "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" (John 7:51). This was a good point. It was an argument for civil liberties. We can applaud it. But it was not confession by Nicodemus of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior, and that alone is what would evidence the new birth. Similarly, after Christ's death Nicodemus came with Joseph of Arimathaea to embalm the dead body (John 19:39), but many unbelievers would do as much out of guilt or sentimentality.

Nicodemus may have believed—*may* have believed, I say—but once again we have no evidence for it. We fail to hear the cry that is the evidence of the breath of God within the human being.

It is so different with the woman of Samaria. She had not wanted to be saved. She did not even want to talk with Jesus on a personal level. Still she was born again, and she proved it immediately by departing for the city of Sychar with the personal invitation and testimony, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (John 4:29). Jesus had revealed himself to her as the Messiah. She believed his testimony, and the claim that the Messiah had come quite naturally became the core of *her* testimony. "The Messiah is here," she was saying.

Changes of Values

The story of the conversion of the woman of Samaria also gives us a second evidence of the fact that she had been born again. She had a change of values, a change in her interests. John indicates it beautifully when he tells us, "Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people..." (v. 28).

I like this personal touch by John who recounts the story. The fact that John tells us that the woman left her water jar is important on one level, at least, as evidence that the story is being told by an eyewitness. This is the sort of thing John often notices and reports—as in the first chapter, in which he reports the hours of the day at which the two disciples stopped to spend the night with Jesus, or that it was night when Judas left the upper room to betray his master, or the fact that the disciples caught 153 fish after Jesus had told them where to cast their nets when he met with them in Galilee after his resurrection. Such details are the mark of the eyewitness; yet the observation by John that the woman left her water jar behind has more significance than its merely being further evidence of John's reliability.

Think how well this fits the story. From one point of view the story is all about water. The woman had come for literal water. There had been a discussion of wells and water. Christ had offered her living water. Now having found the water that alone satisfies the soul, the woman thinks no more of her water jar.

I wonder if you have experienced a change in your life and values as a result of pondering the truths of the gospel. I do not mean, "Have you been totally transformed overnight?" That does not often happen, although it can. Generally, the Christian life is one of growth, just as a baby must grow through childhood, adolescence, and into adult life. I do not mean, "Have you been totally transformed?" I mean, has there been at least a partial transformation of your values? Are you different now since you have believed? Are you being changed?

This is one of the great themes of John's Gospel. It is true that John is very much concerned that there be a vigorous verbal witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. But at the same time he is equally aware that the believer's

life must back up the verbal witness. This theme emerges quite strongly in the final discourses of Jesus just before his crucifixion. In those discourses Jesus says that the disciples are to be one among themselves, just as he and the Father are one (John 14:20; 17:11, 21-22). They are to be committed to their task "in truth" (John 17:19). They are to *do* the truth (John 3:21; 1 John 1:6-7). They are to love one another (John 15:17). They are to keep his commandments (John 14:15). At every point the reality of the new life is to show itself in the life of the believer.

If this is not true of you, perhaps you need to leave the water jars of your old desires and interests in order to bear a vigorous and believable witness to the Lord Jesus.

Concern for the Lost

The final proof of a genuine change in the woman of Samaria is a new concern on her part for others. She had a verbal *confession* followed by a *change* in values. Now she had also a *concern* for the lost. Previously she had known many of the people of Samaria. Some of them she had known too well. But she had never been concerned for them. Probably they had often used her, at least some of them had. She had used them. Now for the first time she was concerned for their salvation. On the basis of the things she had learned she was now overflowing with a desire for them to meet Jesus. We are told: "Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?' They came out of the town and made their way toward him" (John 4:28-30).

What is it that actually gave this woman a concern for those who had been close to her? Someone might answer, "Gratitude, gratitude for what Jesus had done for her." But gratitude would have kept her near Jesus at the well. It would not have sent her to the city. Someone else might answer, "A new awareness of who Jesus was." But certainly this alone would only have encouraged her to discover more about him. Someone might argue that it was "satisfaction at the way he had answered her questions." But again this would hardly have made her a

soul winner. All these reactions, good as they were, would only have kept the woman of Samaria near Jesus.

What made her want to share her discovery? There is only one answer. It was love, the love of the Lord Jesus already beginning to spring up within her. She had learned of this love from Christ. He had loved her, a sinful woman. Now she was to love as he loved. Before, she had loved in one sense only. It was an imperfect, human love. Perhaps it was even largely sexual. Now she was able to love with a measure of the love with which Christ had loved her. This was a divine love, and it changed her completely.

Let me tell you how the gospel first came to Korea, the only Far Eastern country where today there is a substantial Christian population (in excess of 25 percent). Robert J. Thomas, a
Welshman, was a colporteur working in China for the Scottish Bible Society. In the course of his work he learned that the Korean language is based on Chinese and that, as a result, the Korean intellectuals could read it. His main responsibility was toward the millions in China, of course. But the love of Christ for the Koreans constrained him, and he determined to push on to that country. An American ship called the *General Sherman* was sailing to Pyongyang, a large city in the north. He boarded it. As the ship drew near Pyongyang a sharp fight broke out between the officers of the American ship and the Korean coast guard. The ship was burned in the conflict, and all the passengers were killed. The death of Thomas was unusual. As the ship and the passengers were sinking, he struggled to reach the shore and staggered up out of the water, his arms filled with books. They were Bibles. He thrust these into the hands of the Koreans who clubbed him to death. It was through such love that the gospel first came to Korea in the year 1866.

The Bible sets this pattern for us when it declares, "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Do you love because Christ first loved you?

Are you burdened to share the gospel with others who have not yet believed on our Savior?

The Invitation Repeated

Finally, I wonder if you have ever thought about the specific invitation to the men of the city offered by the Samaritan woman. We have already been thinking of three great words each beginning with the letter *C.* They are the evidences of the fact that she had been born again —a *confession* of faith in Christ, a *change* of values, a *concern* for the lost. Three great words beginning with *C!* But here is a fourth, the word "come." This was the heart of her invitation, and she had learned it (as she had learned everything else) from Jesus. What had Jesus said to her?

Jesus had said, "Go, call your husband, and come back" (v. 16). Now she, who had come, repeated the invitation, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (v. 29).

Come! This is a great word of the Christian gospel. It has brought peace to millions of restless hearts and satisfaction to many that were empty and lonely.

Think of the great verses that contain it. It was God's word to Abraham, "*Come* into the land which I shall show thee" (Acts 7:3 KJV). It was God's call to Moses to be Israel's deliverer, "*Come,* I will send you to Egypt" (Acts 7:34). David wrote, *"Come* and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth" (Ps. 46:8). God spoke through Isaiah, saying, *"Come* now, let us reason together ... though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool" (Isa. 1:18). The angels spoke the word to all skeptics as they pointed the disciples to the empty tomb, "*Come* and see the place where he lay" (Matt. 28:6). It was Christ's invitation, *"Come,* follow me" (Mark 10:21). *"Come* to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Finally, it will be the song of the angels as they invite the redeemed to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:17) and of Jesus himself as he says to his own, "Come, you who are blessed by my

Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Matt. 25:34).

If you have heard that invitation from the lips of the Lord, it is your privilege and duty to pass that word on. As in the case of the woman of Samaria, God's "Come!" must become our "Come!" Come! It is the greatest invitation in the universe. Won't you come? If you have already come, won't you share the invitation with another?

Chapter 51.
Christ, the Soul Winner

John 4:30

When Jesus Christ told his disciples that they were to "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19), the Lord was giving them marching orders for the church. They were to be his witnesses. They were to carry the gospel everywhere. When this is said the questions immediately arise: But what *constitutes* the Christian's witness? And *how* can a Christian witness? The first of these questions was answered when we considered the witness of John the Baptist, recorded in the first chapter of John's Gospel. The second question can be answered in the context of Christ's dealings with the woman of Samaria recorded in chapter 4.

Previously we noted that a genuine Christian witness consists of three things (see the chapters on John 1:19-51). First, the witness must realize that he has no independent importance in himself. He must know that he is not the answer to man's problems. Second, he must know that Jesus *is* the answer and must point men and women to him. Third, the witness must point others to Christ with the express intention of having them believe on him. John the Baptist did each of these things well, and this made him the first great example of a witness to Jesus Christ in John's Gospel.

It is entirely possible that a person might understand these truths and even want to witness to Jesus Christ, however, and yet not know how. He might say: I know what I should do, but how do I do it? How do I show that Jesus is the answer to the kid next door who is on drugs? How do I get my sophisticated roommate to admit her need for Jesus Christ? How do I get the mechanic who works on my car to listen to my testimony? How do I overcome the built-in hostility toward the gospel by those who work with me every day? What words do I use to talk about Christ to my wife, my husband, my children, or my friends? If you have ever asked these questions or are still asking them, then a study of the way in which Jesus related to the woman of Samaria should be of help to you and should allow you to build upon the truths we have already considered.

As I look at Christ's dealings with the woman of Samaria, I see five great principles emerging. We can learn from these principles. Moreover, if we do, we will experience results similar to those recorded by John. We are told that many of the Samaritans "came out of the town and made their way toward him" (John 4:30).

The Sinner's Friend

The first great principle is this: *Be a friend* to those you are trying to win. Jesus showed himself a friend to those who were lost. He is described as having been a friend of publicans and sinners; this (although intended critically) was good reporting. Jesus could have kept aloof from mankind, just as we can keep aloof. But he would have won no one that way. Instead, Jesus went to the sick, lost, lonely, distressed, and perishing, and moved among them as a friend. In this story we find him in the woman's country, at the woman's city, sitting on the woman's well (vv. 5-6).

There is an illustration of this basic fact about the Lord Jesus in one of the books by Watchman Nee, the Chinese evangelist. Nee had been talking to another Christian in his home. They were downstairs, as was his friend's son. The friend's wife and mother were in an upstairs room.

All at once the little boy wanted something and called out to his mother for it.

"It's up here," she said. "Come up and get it."

He cried out to her, "I can't, Mummy; it's such a long way. Please bring it down to me."

He was very small. So the mother picked up what he wanted and brought it down to him. It is just that way with salvation. No one is able to meet his own need spiritually, but the Lord Jesus Christ came down to us so our need could be met. Nee writes, "Had He not come, sinners could not have approached Him; but He came down in order to lift them up."

I wonder if you are like that in your witnessing? Do you keep aloof or do you go to others? Another way of asking the same thing is to ask whether or not you have contact with nonChristians socially. Do you go to their homes, sit in their kitchens, ask them their interests?

A great deal of our difficulty in this area comes from the fact that Christians have often looked at the world as if it would inevitably get them dirty if they should get into it. They have taken verses like 2 Corinthians 6:17—"Therefore come out from them and be separate"—as meaning that Christians are to have no dealings with the world, rather than seeing that the words only have to do with avoiding conformity to the world, not isolation from it. Jesus did not teach isolation, and he did not practice it. He said in his great prayer for us recorded in John 17, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one" (v. 15). When he departed for heaven he left his disciples in the world to evangelize it.

I am convinced that we need very practical ways of displaying friendship with the unbelievers we contact—the friendship that was so evident in the life of Jesus. For a start you might invite a number of non-Christian friends into your home for dinner. You might go to a concert with them. You might take in a sports show. Why not befriend your coworkers? Join a club, a choral society, a civic organization. It is

not even a loss to go shopping together or invite your friends in for coffee. These are only beginning suggestions. If you are serious about taking the gospel to the lost, the Lord will show you other fruitful avenues of getting to know non-Christians. Just remember: Take the initiative and be friendly.

Ask Questions

Second, *ask questions.* It is never a bad move to ask questions. As we read the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, we discover that this is precisely what he did, and that he did it at the beginning of the conversation. He asked for a drink (v. 7). Looking at the conversation from the outside, as we do look at it, this is almost amusing. The woman was the one with the needs; she had the real questions. Jesus was the One with the answers. Nevertheless, Jesus humbled himself by asking her for a favor and so established an immediate and genuine point of contact.

Moreover, there were two important consequences as the result of his asking the woman for something. First, he aroused her interest. Dale Carnegie reminds us in his very successful book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People,* that the voice any person likes to hear best is his own. Jesus got the woman of Samaria talking. Her talking put her in a good mood (perhaps even changed her mood if, indeed she had arrived at the well shortly after being pushed off the path by Peter, as in an earlier study I indicated may have been the case). Out of her good mood the woman then clearly developed a favorable interest in Jesus. She must have found herself thinking, "My, what an interesting person this is! How polite! And what discrimination he must have to be interested in *me!*"

The second consequence of the Lord's asking her a question is that the woman found her curiosity aroused. He had asked her a question; she found it natural to begin to ask him a series of questions.

Let me state this again in a slightly different way. People are always full of questions, many of them religious questions. If you can get

them to express these questions through yourself asking questions, by the grace of God you have already accomplished a great deal in your witness and God will use the aroused interest to point the one asking the questions to Jesus. Paul Little has written correctly about provoking such questions, "Once the non-Christian takes the first step in initiative, all pressure goes out of any conversation about Jesus Christ." He adds that thereafter "it can be picked up at the point where it is left without embarrassment."

Something to Give

Third, *offer something relevant.* Jesus offered the woman something related quite directly to her need. In one sense the offer was always of himself, of course. Yet to aging Nicodemus Jesus spoke of himself as one who offers new life, a new beginning (John 3:3). He spoke of himself as light to the man who had been born blind (John 9:5). To the woman the same offer was couched in the metaphor of water. He said, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (vv. 13-14).

Most Christians need to learn from this principle. It will not do for us to witness about the transmission and reliability of the Bible if the person we are talking to is a young woman who isn't interested in that but who is afraid she will end up an "old maid" if she becomes a Christian. We must share Christ's offer to guide our lives and enrich them in whatever way he leads us. It will not be much use for us to speak about the power of Jesus Christ to deliver a person from the grip of drugs or alcohol if the man we are speaking to is a disciplined scientist whose greatest hang-up is his suspicion that other scientists have disproved Christianity. We need to offer him the challenge of searching the Scriptures himself to see whether these things are so and to encourage him to test Christ's claims. Above all we must not present our message in the language of the last century or in cliches that have no meaning to most of the non-Christian world.

Most people are thinking of their own needs. We must offer Jesus to them in ways that relate to those needs.

Good News

Fourth, *stress the good news.* Show that the gospel of Jesus Christ offers comfort. This does not mean, I am sure you realize, that we are totally to overlook sin. Jesus did not do that. He brought the woman to the point of recognizing her sin by his reference to the issue of her husbands. Nevertheless, even as he gently uncovered the sin he offered comfort, for he coupled his inquiry into her marital status with the invitation to come again to him (v. 16).

Unfortunately, it is true that we often do exactly the opposite in witnessing to non-Christians. The comfort of the gospel is there; but we forget the comfort, in our zeal to expose (and, I am afraid, often condemn) the sin. For instance, imagine a situation in which a non-Christian offers a Christian a drink at a party. Aren't there thousands of Christians who would immediately reply, "No, thank you. I don't drink. I'm a Christian"? They then think that they have offered a splendid witness to Jesus Christ, when actually they have really only succeeded in condemning the nonChristian. At the same time, they would have given him the wrong idea that nondrinking is somehow a very important part of Christianity. Nondrinking may be an important part of their Christian life. But the point I am making is that the statement "I don't drink; I'm a Christian" is no more intelligible to the unbeliever than his saying to you, when you ask him to go to a football game, "No thanks. I don't go to football games; I'm a non-Christian."

There are two real dangers in this. The first is the danger that in getting our witness tangled up in such issues, we miss the fact that our friend may be quite desperately lonely—perhaps that is why he drinks—and never suggest a cure for his loneliness. Or we may miss his feeling of guilt, sorrow, meaninglessness, or whatever it may be.

The second danger is that in focusing attention on some aspect of the nonbeliever's conduct, we may actually give the impression that he

must improve himself before he can come to Jesus. This is quite wrong. We will never want to give the impression that when we come to Jesus we can do as we please, that we can sin that grace might abound. That would be untrue also. But neither do we want to suggest that there must be self-reformation before a man or a woman can come.

In England, in the early part of the nineteenth century, there was a woman who had heard the gospel but who had never been able to respond to it personally. She had come from a Christian home. She understood the faith. But still she could not come. She considered herself unworthy. One day she wandered into a very small church and sat down in the back. She was almost in despair and hardly heard the words of the elderly man who was speaking. Suddenly, right in the middle of his address, the preacher stopped and, pointing his finger at her, said, "You, Miss, sitting there at the back, you can be saved *now.* You don't need to do anything!" His words struck like thunder in her heart. She believed at once, and with her belief there came an unimagined sense of peace and real joy. That night Charlotte Elliott went home and wrote the well-known hymn:

> Just as I am, without one plea,
> But that thy blood was shed for me,
> And that thou bidd'st me come to thee,
> O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

If we are to witness for Jesus Christ, we must never give the impression that a person must first become worthy of the gospel. Nor should we forget that there is comfort in the gospel for sinners.

Point to Jesus

The fifth principle is that we must end by confronting the individual with his responsibility to decide for or against Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I who speak to you am he" (v. 26). Well, was he or wasn't he? This was the decision placed before the woman. It must be the same in our witnessing. If we do not get to the point of focusing on Jesus himself, our witness is incomplete. It is not yet a full witness. If we do not get to

the point of showing that a decision is necessary, our witness is inadequate.

These are the principles of how we should witness, from the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman. First, be friendly. Second, ask questions. Third, offer that which most suits the individual's needs. Fourth, stress the good news. And fifth, show that the person must decide either for or against the Lord Jesus.

What will happen if you do that? I believe that the results will be similar to those that the Lord Jesus experienced in Samaria. The first obvious results were in the life of the woman. About midway through the conversation, the woman acknowledged her need, saying, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty" (v. 15). A few moments later she confessed her sin, "I have no husband" (v. 17). Third, she began to show a quickening of spiritual intelligence: "I can see that you are a prophet" (v. 19). Fourth, she affirmed her faith in the Lord Jesus: "Could this be the Christ?" (v. 29). Finally, she took to her town the good news that she had received.

You may think that the people among whom you work or with whom you associate may be difficult specimens to speak to. That may be true. So was the woman. Yet she became the first great witness after John the Baptist. It may be that God will use your witness to reach one who in his turn may evangelize an entire generation.

Chapter 52.
The Secret of Satisfaction

John 4:31-34

In Spain there is a very old proverb that says, "All laws go the way that kings desire." Behind that proverb is a rather interesting story. About the beginning of the twelfth century, there was a debate about whether the country's churches were to use Gothic or Roman prayer books in

their services. The question eventually came before Alfonso VI, who was king at the time. Alfonso decided to leave the matter to chance, so he threw a copy of both prayer books into a fire, declaring that the one that survived the ordeal should be chosen. However, when the Gothic missal survived the blaze, the king immediately threw it back into the fire and chose the Roman liturgies. Thus was the matter decided, and the proverb became popular throughout the country.

Many Christians treat the will of God in this manner. They say they want God's will. They declare that they are leaving the matter up to him. But then, when God reveals what they are to do, they continue trying to "find out his will," as they say, until events finally turn out to suit them. When they eventually do get their way—and, of course, find that it does not yield them the satisfaction they had hoped for—many of these persons become confused and desperately unhappy.

Unfortunately, such persons have never learned that true satisfaction in life comes from yielding totally to God's will in God's service and that knowing God's will consists in being willing to do it even before we know what it is.

The Will of God

If you have ever found yourself in the place of trying to get God's will to conform to your own— most of us have at one time or another—then you should be helped by the thoughts that the Lord Jesus Christ shared with his disciples on this subject.

We are told in the fourth chapter of John's Gospel that when Jesus and his disciples arrived in Samaria, where he was to meet the Samaritan woman, Jesus waited in the valley near Jacob's well while his disciples went up the hill to Sychar to buy food. While they were gone the woman came, and Jesus talked to her, leading her to faith. About the time the woman left her water jar to go up to the city to bring others to Jesus, the disciples had finished their errand and had returned. They were surprised that Jesus had been talking to the woman, but they were doubly surprised when Jesus showed no interest in the food they had

purchased. He told them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." Peter and John and the others thought on the purely literal level, as Nicodemus and the woman had also both done, and began to wonder if someone had brought him food during their absence. At this point Jesus replied that the food he was talking about was not physical but spiritual. He said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (v. 34).

This is a great sentence. It is even a "golden sentence," as Charles Haddon Spurgeon once described it. In essence these words are an expression of what was undoubtedly the keynote of Jesus' life, telling us that above all else Jesus lived to do God's will. They are the essence of his life. Moreover, they tell us that doing God's will gave Jesus complete satisfaction.

We shall understand a great deal more about the satisfaction that comes from desiring God's will and doing it when we compare the obedience of Jesus, recorded here and elsewhere, with the disobedience of Satan with which it forms a great contrast. In Isaiah 14 we are told in four verses of the thoughts that entered Satan's mind at the moment of his revolt against God and of the eventual results of this rebellion. The point of the verses is that Satan's revolt occurred in the area of the will, in desiring his will rather than God's, and resulted in dissatisfaction for Satan and his eventual judgment. Isaiah writes, "How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit" (Isa. 14:12-15).

In these verses there are two interesting features in Satan's thought. The first is Satan's desire to climb above that station to which God had called him. He had already been given the highest position of any created being. According to Ezekiel he was "full of wisdom and perfect in beauty" (Ezek. 28:12). He was what we might call the king and high

priest of the creation. Nevertheless, none of this was enough for Satan. Satan desired to rise into heaven ... above the stars ... to sit upon the mount of the assembly ... above the heights of the clouds ... to be like the Most High. In other words, he wanted to push God off the throne and receive the worship of the universe himself.

The second important feature of these verses is the strong assertion of Satan's own will. If you take time to count the occurrence of the phrase "I will" in these verses, you will see that Satan asserts his own will five times. He said, "I will... I will... I will... I will... I will." In time Satan's "I will" was multiplied many billions of times, first by the very distinct and equally rebellious "wills" of his followers and then by the "I wills" of billions of men and women. Satan's "I will" was the origin of sin in the universe; the results of sin show the tragic consequences of anyone's attempting to do things in any way other than that which God determines.

What were the results of this rebellion? When Satan caused Adam and Eve to sin in the Garden of Eden, God expressed the results of willfulness by telling Satan that it would be his fate to eat dust all the days of his life (Gen. 3:14). This symbolizes dissatisfaction. We might say that God told Satan that life for him would be dry, unnourishing, and tasteless. In Isaiah God describes the same thing in another way by describing Satan's end. "But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit."

How different was the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ! Jesus declared, "I desire to do your will, O my God" (Ps. 40:8). Paul later wrote of his obedience, saying that Jesus "did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil. 2:6-10).

It is a great contrast. Satan exalted his own will and found nothing but misery. He brought misery to others. Jesus submitted himself to the will of God and both found and brought blessing.

I wonder if you have been able to learn from this contrast. Do you see the benefits of submitting yourself to God's will? Are you willing to go in whatever direction he sends you? I am convinced that we know little about our own natures until we come to the point of recognizing that naturally we prefer our will to God's and that even at best, even after God works with us, we often only desire to know and to do his will halfheartedly.

Have you ever prayed to know God's will, surrendering yourself to him as best you know how, had his answer, but then had a heavy feeling as you set out to do as he directed? If so, isn't it true that you are acting like the little girl who wrote to her grandmother to thank her for her Christmas present? She wrote, "Dear Grandma, thank you for the pincushion. I have always wanted a pincushion, but not very much." We are all like that. We say, "Thank you, Lord, for having a will for my life. I have always wanted your will for my life." Yet if we are honest, we are forced to admit, "... but not very much." Thus it is that for many people one of the great steps in their spiritual growth comes when their will is first surrendered to God's will and they are enabled to say, as Jesus did, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me."

Doing the Will of God

That verse also leads to a second point in our study, for Jesus did not say, "My food is to *will* the will of him who sent me." That is important enough, but it is only part of the story. He actually said, "My food is to *do* the will of him who sent me." This is important for us, for it is often true that even when the will of God is revealed to us we fail to do it.

At one point in his ministry Jesus told a story involving a father and his two sons. The father owned a vineyard. He came to the first son

and said, "Son, go work today in my vineyard." The son said, "No, I won't." But afterward, Jesus reported, the son repented and went.

The father came to the second son and gave him identical instructions. This son said, "Yes, I'll work in the vineyard." But then he failed to do it.

Jesus asked those who were listening to him, "Which of the two did the will of his father?" When they pointed out that it was the first of the sons, in spite of the fact that initially he had refused, Jesus then showed that this was precisely the contrast between the religious leaders of his day who were always saying, "Yes, yes," to God but who were not obeying him, and the sinners of his day who initially disobeyed but after that repented.

The contrast is still valid. Do you say, "Yes, yes," but then not do what God instructs you to do?

Or do you do his will and not merely talk about it?

I have always been impressed by the number of verses in the Bible that give us specific things to do. For instance, if you are not yet a Christian, there is a verse in the Sermon on the Mount that is specifically for you. Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it" (Matt. 7:13). If you are not yet a Christian, God's will for you is that you might believe in Jesus as your Savior.

If you are a Christian, there are hundreds of clear-cut statements for you to consider. Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). He said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). Peter wrote, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). He wrote, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ...Be self-controlled and alert" (1 Peter 5:6, 8). Paul declared, "Therefore, I urge

you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:1-2). A list of such verses could be almost endless, but this is enough for our purposes. Do you do such things? Do you work at them? Let me share a challenge that the great Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon had for the congregations of his day. Spurgeon wrote this about doing God's will: "Some of you good people, who do nothing except go to public meetings, and Bible readings, and prophetic conferences, and other forms of spiritual dissipation, would be a good deal better Christians if you would look after the poor and needy around you. If you would just tuck up your sleeves for work, and go and tell the Gospel to dying men, you would find your spiritual health mightily restored, for very much of the sickness of Christians comes through their having nothing to do. All feeding and no working makes men spiritual dyspeptics. Be idle, careless, with nothing to live for, nothing to care for, no sinner to pray for, no backslider to lead back to the cross, no trembler to encourage, no little child to tell of a Savior, no greyheaded man to enlighten in the things of God, no object, in fact, to live for; and who wonders if you begin to groan, and to murmur, and to look within, until you are ready to die of despair? Let us have practical Christianity."

Finishing the Work

Finally, Jesus did not merely say, "My food is to *will* the will of him that sent me" or even "My food is to *do* the will of him that sent me." He said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me *and to finish his work.*" Unfortunately, many of us begin the work but then fail to finish it.

Before the incarnation, Jesus declared through David, "Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:7-8). To do that, Jesus

Christ assumed our humanity. Jesus was born in Bethlehem and was raised in the dirty little town of Nazareth and grew up in the carpenter shop of his earthly stepfather Joseph. In time he began his teaching ministry, a ministry that took him throughout all the towns and villages of Palestine. During these years, he looked ahead to the cross, which loomed ever larger before him. Finally, just before his crucifixion as he prayed in the garden, Jesus observed, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4). One of his last cries from the cross was, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

Aren't you glad that the Lord Jesus Christ finished the work that God the Father gave him to do? It resulted in our salvation. Are you like him in that? Are you attempting to finish the work that you have been given?

Early in his life, George Müller, the founder of the well-known faith orphanages in England, made friendships with three men, none of whom was a Christian. Müller was burdened for these three friends and began to pray for them. He prayed for years, recording in his diary the fact that he was continuing to pray for them. Müller prayed throughout his lifetime and finally died without seeing any one of them come to faith. Nevertheless, after Müller's death, each of these three men believed, two of them well up in their seventies and one over eighty years of age.

The other story is told by Spurgeon of a missionary who had gone to the American Indians. As this man lay dying, the last thing he did was to teach a little child its letters so that the child might begin to read. Someone remarked how strange it was to see such a great man at such a seemingly insignificant work. But he replied that he thanked God that when he could no longer preach, he still had at least enough strength to teach the poor child. This man desired to finish his life's work. He wanted to brush in the final stroke that would complete the picture.

You have not finished the work that you have been given if you have merely put in a year at it, teaching a class, serving on a board. You have not finished the work if you have merely gone witnessing on a

weekend. You have not finished your work merely by trying to help a child once and then dropping this great responsibility. The will of God is done for you only when your part is ended and the work itself is entrusted into the hands of your successor.

Chapter 53.
God's Harvest

John 4:35-38

There are few things in life so tragic as having missed a great opportunity. Let me give you an example.

During the first three days of July 1863, in the midst of America's great Civil War, the armies of the North and South clashed decisively at Gettysburg. For the first three days of the battle the fighting was inconclusive, but then the tide began to turn against General Lee and the
Confederate forces. The northern troops under General G. G. Meade were winning. Lee began to retreat southward on the night of July 4, while storm clouds drenched the east coast with rain. When Lee reached the Potomac, he found that the river was swollen with rain. He could not cross it. Behind him was the victorious Union army. Before him was the river. He was trapped.

Here was the great, golden opportunity for General Meade. Meade could have attacked immediately, destroying Lee's army and, in effect, ending the Civil War. President Lincoln actually ordered him to attack. However, instead of attacking, Meade delayed. He held a council, then delayed again. Eventually the water of the river receded, and Lee escaped over the Potomac, from which ground he was able to extend the war by two more years. Meade never regained his lost opportunity, and it was to General Grant that Lee eventually surrendered on April 9, 1865.

This story shows us the tragedy of having missed a great opportunity. But if this principle is true in the physical realm, as we realize, it is certainly more true spiritually. The Bible recognizes this when it says, "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). Or again, "If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Cor. 3:15).

Apparently, the Lord Jesus Christ had been thinking along these lines as the result of the failure of the disciples to understand the need of the Samaritan woman. No doubt, as the disciples had started up the hill toward Sychar, the Lord had gazed after them. He had seen them pass the woman who was on her way down. She was the one to whom Jesus had come to Samaria to witness, but the disciples were unaware of her need. Perhaps they had even stood several abreast in the path and forced her to go around them with her water jar, while all this time Jesus looked after them from the well. After Jesus had spoken to the woman and the disciples returned, of what were they thinking? Once again, it was certainly not of her or her need. They had completed their errand. Now they wanted the Lord Jesus Christ to eat lunch.

Jesus must have smiled as he began to teach them, first, about the priority of spiritual things over physical things and, then, about their great opportunities. They had missed one opportunity, but Jesus did not chide them about that. Instead he began to teach them about their next opportunity so that they might not miss it.

He used a proverb to do it. The proverb said that after sowing seed a farmer needs to wait four months for the harvest. Jesus argued that in the present case that was not so: "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together" (vv. 35-36).

The development of the story shows that this was certainly true metaphorically. The hills of Samaria were spiritually ripe, for many of

the Samaritans believed (vv. 39, 41). Nevertheless, it may even have been true in an observable sense. At any rate, I can imagine the woman returning with the men of the city even while Jesus was talking with the disciples so that, when he said that the fields were "ripe" to harvest, this was literally true as hundreds of the townspeople in their white robes began streaming down the hillside toward him.

The disciples had missed one opportunity; Jesus did not want them to miss this one. He was using the incident to show that there were now great opportunities for the spread of the gospel, and he was encouraging them on the basis of these opportunities to be missionaries.

Motivations for Mission

This was not to be the only motivation for their great assignment of bringing other men and women to the Lord, of course. Nor is it our only motivation. The first great motivation for evangelism is that the followers of Jesus Christ are not at liberty to set their own priorities. We are under marching orders, as the Duke of Wellington once said in answer to a similar question, and it is the Lord Jesus Christ, our commander-in-chief, who has issued them. What are the orders? The orders are that we are to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, baptizing those who believe, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This command, spoken to the disciples later, is given to us several times—once in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and in the opening chapter of Acts.

In each case the emphasis is different. In Matthew's account, the account of Christ's commissioning of the disciples to world mission in Galilee, the *authority* of the Lord is emphasized. Here Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:18-19). In Mark the emphasis falls upon the *final judgment.* Luke presents the great commission as the fulfillment of *Old Testament prophecy,* for it is through the preaching of the cross that blessing is to come to the

nations. In John's account Christ places the great commission in the context of *his own commissioning* by the Father. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). Finally, in Acts the command is linked to a definite *program of world evangelization.* "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

In light of these texts it should be evident that the command to evangelize the world is a command that touches each of us personally. It touched all Christ's disciples then. It touches all Christ's disciples now. The question is not *whether* you should go but *where* you should go. Wherever he sends you, there you are to be a missionary and an evangelist.

You may have to witness in your office. You may have to witness in your home. You may have to witness at school. You may be saying, "But I don't have the courage." Well, God knows that you lack it, but he has promised to supply all your need according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. You may be saying, "But I have a family and children to take care of." Why should that hinder you? It certainly should not hinder you from giving a witness where you are today. It should not even deter you from work abroad if that is what God has called you to. Perhaps God will pick you up now and fill you with a yearning to spread his Word in a place you now know only by name but will one day come to love with a divine love and regard the place of your greatest labor for him.

Men Are Lost

The second motivation for world missions is that men and women are lost without Jesus Christ. This means that they are lost in this life as well as for eternity. Paul wrote to the Ephesians that before their conversion they were "separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). Jeremiah wrote of men as "lost sheep" (Jer. 50:6). Jesus told pointed stories about a lost sheep, a

lost coin, and a lost son (Luke 15). John wrote of Jesus, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18). The same truths are taught in Revelation 20:11-15 where we are told about the judgment of the great white throne. At this judgment all are called to account, and those whose names are not found written in the Book of Life are lost.

Are men really lost? The great weight of theological opinion in our day is against this conclusion, but the Bible teaches it and we must stand with God's Word.

The various shades of universalism in the church are opposed to this teaching. It is probably universalism more than any other single factor that has blunted the cutting edge of evangelism and severed the lifeline of missions. The view of most anthropologists is against it. They tend to glorify primitive cultures. Often they teach that the spread of the gospel tarnishes an essentially beautiful religion. The truth of the matter is that although there may be and undoubtedly are some glimmerings of truth in paganism, the glimmers of truth that men may possess never lead them to God, and, as a result, there is always a great deal more of degradation and perversion in primitive cultures than nobility. The third ground on which the teaching of the Bible is opposed is religious relativism, the view that all men are on the same road to God and that the differences we see are only the differences between the various stages along it.

Are these views right? If they are right, then we may take our ease, leaving the world at peace. However, if they are wrong and the Bible is right, then we must give for the support of missions and we must go wherever God sends us.

Physical Needs

The third motivation for missions is found in the physical and social needs of large portions of the human race. The physical and social needs of men are not our prime motivation, for we know that it profits

little if people gain the blessings of this world while losing their own souls. Yet these needs are a strong motivation, and they impel us onward. The Bible tells us that many times as the Lord looked upon the sick, poor, needy, and lonely, he had compassion upon them and healed their infirmities. He sat down with sinners. He touched the lepers. We are to follow his example.

I know that someone will reply, "But I am not sure that I want to do that. Doesn't it mean that I myself will get dirty?" In one sense, it does; but you are called to a life of such involvement.

When the great musician Johann Sebastian Bach was first called to the Sans-souci Palace in Potsdam by King Frederick the Great, he decided upon his arrival that he should first freshen himself from his journey. Instead, the king commanded an instant appearance, and Bach therefore arrived in the palace dirty and improperly attired. Some of the courtiers, with their court manners and habits, laughed at Bach's appearance. But the king instantly chided them for their insensitive contempt, and he had Bach play. Later, Zinzendorf, who knew the story, applied it to Christianity and Christian workers, saying, "Nothing is more beautiful than a dusty warrior." He was right. Nothing so commends the evangelist as an involvement with the persons whom he serves. Nothing in their need—be it spiritual, moral, social, or physical—should fail to impel him forward.

Fourth, the love of the Lord Jesus Christ impels us. Paul wrote, "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

A Ripe Harvest

Finally, we are motivated in the task of evangelism by the opportunities that each succeeding day thrusts upon us. Do we seize the opportunities as Christ did? Or do we do as the disciples did and walk by them?

We need to realize that the opportunities that are present today are present because of the coming of Jesus Christ and not because of any fortuitous arrangement of circumstances or because of our imagined ability to create them. This thought is suggested in the verses in a way that is not at once apparent to the casual reader. When Jesus quoted the proverb about the lapse of four months between sowing and harvest and disagreed with it, saying that the sowing and reaping could take place simultaneously, he was reminding the disciples of an Old Testament prophecy that had to do with the coming of the Messiah. According to the Old Testament the Messiah would usher in a period of great physical blessing for this earth. Amos had written, "'The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes'" (Amos 9:13). Moses had written, "Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting" (Lev. 26:5). In a spiritual sense this had come true. The Messiah had come. Thus, the age of waiting had passed, and the period of perpetual reaping had dawned.

Are you aware of this harvest? Are you aware that God's Spirit is moving in our time? I am convinced he is. This is particularly evident in the student world. Let us ask ourselves: Are we awake to these opportunities and present to take advantage of them? Do we speak the Word in season? Are we available? If not, we must ask the Lord of the harvest to help us see the fields of ripe grain.

A Second Proverb

There is, however, one more proverb referred to by Jesus. It comes at the end of this section. It is true, said Jesus, that in the day of the Messiah, the reaper shall overtake the sower. But it is also true that at times the sower will not see the results of his labors. "One sows and another reaps," said Jesus. "I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor" (John 4:37-38).

If you obey the Lord Jesus Christ and witness as he has commanded you to do, there is no guarantee that in every case you will see the

results of your labors. Jesus will encourage you in your witness. You will probably see people come to faith in him. You will reap. But it is also true that, when you sow, some of the results of that sowing will appear only in an age when you are gone and that you will *not* see it. Do not be discouraged if that happens. We are harvesting fruit that is the result of the efforts of our predecessors. There will also be harvesting on the basis of the sowing that is going on today. We may see the results. We may not see the results. But whatever the case, we are to keep on with our commission.

The question for us is, "Do we sow the seed?" That is our job. We are to take the Word of the living God to those who need to hear it and thus allow the Lord Jesus Christ to use it to bring forth a harvest in their lives.

Chapter 54.
The Savior of the World

John 4:39-42

If ever there was a great spiritual climax to a story, that climax is found in the phrase with which John the evangelist ends his account of Christ's conversation with the woman of Samaria. The woman had believed in Jesus as the result of his conversation with her and had immediately gone off to her own city to tell others about him. These came and believed. They asked Christ to stay with them. When he did, others believed also. John's account of this miniature revival in Samaria is then rounded off with the concluding testimony of these new believers concerning Jesus: "They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the *Savior of the world*'" (John 4:42).

This great phrase—"the Savior of the world"—concludes John's story and is therefore particularly significant. Of course, no one really wanted a Savior of the *world* in Christ's day. The Jews wanted a savior of

Jerusalem. The Samaritans wanted a savior of Samaria, as their conduct at a later time indicates (cf. Luke 9:52, 53). The Greeks wanted to save Greece; the Romans, to save Rome. But Jesus was not this kind of a savior. Jesus is the Savior of the *world.* Jesus appeared on earth for men of all races in order that he might die for them and be the means of their salvation.

It is because he did this that you and I, who are not Jews, have a Savior.

The Human Race

Before we look at this phrase—"the Savior of the world"—we need to look at the very important word "world." In Greek the word is *kosmos*. It occurs about 185 times in the New Testament, but what is highly significant for our study is that 105 of these 185 occurrences are in the books traditionally attributed to John. The word *kosmos* occurs 78 times in the Gospel of John, 24 times in John's epistles, and 3 times in Revelation. We get a sense of how unusual John's use of the word is when we realize that Matthew uses the word only 8 times and that it occurs just 3 times each in the Gospels of Mark and Luke. In other words, we are dealing here with one of the great concepts, or themes, of John's Gospel.

But what does the word *kosmos* mean? Initially the word probably denoted an ornament; that is, an object that was decorative or beautiful because it was well proportioned or well constructed. This usage appears many times in Homer and is preserved for us in our English word "cosmetic." From this original use, the word passed quite naturally into a word describing the universe because of its beauty and harmony. The universe is God's ornament. This sense of the word is retained in one of the three uses of it in John 1:10, which tells us that the world (meaning the universe) was made by Jesus Christ. Since the earth with its order and beauty was the most significant part of the universe for mankind, it was natural that the word *kosmos* should next be applied to this earth and, after that, to the men who live upon it.

This latter idea is the one normally used by John. In John the word *kosmos* most often means "the human race." In the later chapters of the Gospel particularly, the word denotes the human race in its opposition to God. Consequently, those who are called to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are distinguished from it. We find John writing: "It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love" (John 13:1). Later, Jesus makes the distinction even clearer by praying on behalf of the disciples: "I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours" (John 17:9).

In these later chapters the line of distinction is drawn between those who are Christ's and those who are merely "of the world." In the early chapters (that is, before Jesus has begun to do much of his work) the references deal with Christ's actions toward the human race generally.

God's Light

Let us look at some of these references. The first important one is John 1:9, which says, "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world."

What does that mean? If we are to understand this verse, we need to remember, first of all, that it does not refer to some imagined divine light or spark of divinity that is said to be innate to mankind. That is a view which has been held by the Quakers and peripheral Christian denominations, but it is not what the verse is teaching. We discussed this issue in one of our studies of John's first chapter. The "Light" of the verse really refers to the historical Jesus. The point of the verse is that Jesus shone upon all men—from the outside, as a spotlight shines upon the darkened front of an empty house—rather than there being any light shining forth from within.

The fact that Jesus shines upon all men is, however, important. It is important because it tells us that he is the light, rather than another. The

verse says that he is the "true" or "genuine" light. It is important because we are told that the light is for all.

Do you realize that it is only because of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ that you, a Gentile (if you are a Gentile), have spiritual light? Before Christ's coming, salvation was, as Jesus maintained, "of the Jews." To the Jews belonged the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises (Rom. 9:4). That is true; it is a fact of our history. On one occasion, when Daniel O'Connell, a nineteenth-century Irish politician, taunted the great English statesman Benjamin Disraeli in the House of Commons about his being a Jew, Disraeli replied, "Yes, I am a Jew; and when the ancestors of this right honorable gentleman were brutal savages in an unknown island [he meant Ireland], mine were priests in the temple of Solomon and were giving law and religion to the world." It was a just rebuke. For centuries the true light of divine revelation was confined to Judaism. Now, however, through Jesus Christ the light of God's law and true religion have come to us Gentiles.

Have you recognized that the Lord Jesus Christ came to be your Light? If you will allow him to do so, he will use that light first to reveal the darkness of your heart and life to you and then to lead you into the light of his truth and righteousness.

The Lamb

The second important reference to the relationship of Jesus Christ to the world of men is that he came to be the world's Savior. That is the teaching of John the Baptist who declared, "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29). Jesus is only the Savior of those who believe on him, for
salvation is through faith alone. "Without faith it is impossible to please God," says the author of Hebrews (Heb. 11:6). Yet it is also correct to say that he died in order that all might come to repentance.

I wonder if you have ever pondered on all that is involved in that phrase, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." At the

very least it referred to the sacrifices, as I pointed out in an earlier study. The sacrificial lamb had always figured highly in Israel's religious culture. Abel had sacrificed a lamb and thereby received God's blessing. Abraham had performed various sacrifices. The offering of lambs figured in the worship at the temple and was practiced daily. Thus, when John the Baptist termed Jesus the "Lamb of God," he was clearly identifying Jesus as the innocent substitute who would die in place of all those who have sinned.

However, John's phrase also referred to the culmination and far-reaching effect of the sacrifices. To understand the importance of this truth, we need to go back to the time when God first instituted sacrifices. There in the Garden of Eden, after man had sinned, God shed the blood of one animal for one person and then established this as a repeatable form of worship on the basis of which a sinful man might come to him. When Abel did that, God judged him righteous (Heb. 11:4). He rejected the more beautiful offering of Cain because it was not a sacrifice.

For thousands of years men lived with this basic one-lamb-for-one-person institution. The time came when the Jews were in slavery in Egypt and God was about to bring them out and lead them into their own land. At this time God instituted the Passover. Each family in Israel was to take a lamb and examine it for defects. Only a perfect lamb could be chosen. After three days, on the night of the Passover, the lamb was to be killed and eaten and its blood spread upon the lintel and side posts of the door of the house as a sign to the angel of death to pass over that house as it went through Egypt slaying the firstborn that night. One lamb for a person? Yes! But here God revealed that it could also be one lamb for one family.

The Exodus took place, and several months later the people were at Mount Sinai where God gave them the law. In the law were instructions for the Day of Atonement, on which the high priest was to kill a lamb for the nation and then take its blood within the veil into the Holy of Holies, where it was sprinkled upon the mercy seat beneath the wings of the cherubim. Here was the progression: one lamb for one person,

one lamb for one family, one lamb for one nation. ...But then Jesus came, and it was John's role to identify him as one lamb for this world.

For some years now I have been convinced that this was the primary meaning of Palm Sunday. Men who love liturgy and liturgical parades have seized upon this event, as men will, and have built it into a day of triumph in which Jesus supposedly presented himself as King to a warm and enthusiastic populace. But that is not what Palm Sunday is about. Jesus did not present himself as King to the people of Jerusalem only to be surprised several days later by their rejection of him. The day of crucifixion was the necessary prelude to Easter, and Palm Sunday was the necessary prelude to the day of the crucifixion. At Calvary Jesus died as God's Lamb. Palm Sunday was the day on which that Lamb was led into Jerusalem. Palm Sunday was the day on which Jesus offered himself as our substitute.

This was probably true in a very literal way. We must remember that the idea that Jesus was crucified on what we call Good Friday is a tradition inherited from a later period of church history and is therefore not necessarily accurate. In fact, recent studies have indicated that Jesus may have died just before sundown on Thursday of Passover week; that is, before a Friday Passover beginning on Thursday evening. According to this reckoning, there would have been two sabbaths in that particular Passover week, the regular Saturday Sabbath and the Friday Passover Sabbath. Thus, Jesus would have died on Thursday, would have spent three days and three nights in the tomb, as he foretold, and would have risen from the grave before sunrise on Sunday morning, which was (by Jewish reckoning) the first day of the week.

The bearing that all this has upon the matter of the Passover lambs is readily apparent. For if
Jesus was crucified on Thursday before a Friday Passover and if he entered Jerusalem on Sunday, as the Bible indicates, then Jesus was entering Jerusalem at the precise moment at which the thousands of Passover lambs were being led into the city to be taken into the thousands of Jewish homes. What better way could Jesus have

dramatized the claim that he was God's Lamb? When he later died, as he did, at the precise moment when, according to John, the Jewish people were actually killing their lambs and feeding on them, the imagery was complete.

Do you realize that Jesus Christ truly is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of this world? Do you realize that he came to die for you? Each of us should believe these things and commit ourselves to him.

God So Loved the World

The final important reference to the world in the opening chapters of the Gospel is in John 3:16. There we read: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Where can a sinful human being such as you or I learn that God is love? You will not find it taught in books on human history. You will not find it in philosophy or in your own reasoning. You will not even find it in the other religions of this world. You will find this truth only in Christianity, at the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. How do we know that God loves us? It is not because someone else tells us so. He may be mistaken. It is not because the universe is beautiful; the universe is also horrible at times. There is no love in space; space is nothingness. Even on earth we must admit that there are tidal waves and hurricanes, earthquakes and disease, just as there are gorgeous spring days and beautiful sunsets. How do we know that God loves us? Only because Jesus of Nazareth died for us! The Bible says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

He died for us even when we were hostile toward him. What did men do when Jesus appeared as the Light? Men rejected the Light. What did men do when he appeared as the Lamb? Men crucified the Lamb. What did men do when Jesus appeared as the great and supreme manifestation of God's love? Men hated that love and despised it.

So we ask ourselves: Can God really love a race that rejects his Light, crucifies his Lamb, and despises his love? Everything within ourselves would say no. But the reality of the crucified Christ forces us to say yes, for he is indeed the Savior of such a sinful and rebellious world.
Samuel Medley expressed this in a song written toward the middle of the eighteenth century:

Awake, my soul, in joyful lays,
And sing thy great Redeemer's praise:
He justly claims a song from me,
His loving-kindness is so free.

He saw me ruined in the fall,
Yet loved me notwithstanding all,
And saved me from my lost estate;
His loving-kindness is so great.

May the knowledge of the truth of the love of God for our race, found so long ago by the woman of Samaria and her friends, be yours as you come to know our great Savior.

Chapter 55.
Christ in Galilee

John 4:43-45

Not long ago a person complained to me that the Bible is difficult to understand. His objection was not only that the language of the Bible is difficult—I pointed out that there are very readable modern translations such as the American Bible Society's Good News for Modern Man or the New York Bible Society's New International Version—but that even then the concepts are difficult and that many passages contain contradictions. Because of this problem the person told me that in his opinion God was being difficult and unfair.

I answered this objection in two ways. I said that first of all it is really not right to charge that the basic message of the Bible is difficult to understand. It may be difficult to accept. I believe that no one ever does accept it unless God has already done a previous supernatural work in his mind and heart. Still this is not the same thing as saying that it is difficult to understand. "How, for instance, could God make John 3:16 any clearer?" I asked. "He simply tells us that he loves us so much that he sent his Son to die in our place so that anyone who commits himself to him will not be separated from him forever but will have new life. In other words," I said, "God has made the basic message of the Bible so clear that even a child can understand it," and, indeed, many do.

"On the other hand," I added, "it is also true that there are parts of the Bible that seem to contain contradictions and are difficult to understand. But then, aren't we glad that the Bible contains statements that are deep enough to challenge our thought and keep us learning even through a lifetime of Bible study? The fact that this is true is one proof that the Bible is from God, for no other book would be so infinitely provocative and challenging. Moreover, I have personally learned, as have many others, that it is often the passages that seem difficult on first reading that yield the greatest harvest as the result of a deeper investigation."

The Problem

I give this particular introduction to these verses simply because they contain just such a difficulty and yet, upon a closer study, yield great blessing. The difficulty is apparent to anyone who reads them, and it becomes even more evident (at least initially) when these verses are compared with similar verses in the other Gospels.

Let me explain what I mean. John 4:43-45 says: "After the two days he left for Galilee. (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there." Quite obviously, these verses are transition verses, taking the reader from the period of Christ's life spent in Samaria to the next stage of his ministry in Galilee, and

they give a reason for Christ's decision to move to Galilee. The difficulty is that all the other Gospels also report the reason that John gives for Christ's move to Galilee, quoting Jesus as saying that a prophet has no honor in his own country, but in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus is quoted as saying this of Galilee as an explanation of why he had to go somewhere else (Matt. 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24), while in John the move is reversed.

Moreover, there is a second difficulty that is apparent even without comparing the Gospels. In John Jesus says that he is going to Galilee because he will have no honor there. Yet the next verse tells us that "the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast."

What is the solution? Well, different answers have been given. First, some commentators have argued that Jesus went to Galilee to prove that his saying spoken earlier about not being received there was actually the case. The difficulty with this view is that, if this is what Jesus intended, he was mistaken, for he actually proved that even the Galileans would receive him. A second explanation is historical. Those who hold it argue that after the success Jesus had just known in Samaria, he wanted to slip away to a place where he would be able to rest. That sounds plausible, but it runs aground on the difficulty that Jesus had apparently determined to go back to Galilee even before he had the success that he did in Samaria (John 4:3), and, of course, even in this explanation he is mistaken. A third explanation is that to John "his own country" was actually Judea, rather than Galilee, and that in his view Jesus was returning to Galilee because the Jews in Jerusalem had not responded to his teaching. That would be a satisfactory explanation were it not for the fact that the other three Gospels all apply Christ's statement to Galilee.

If none of these explanations is adequate then, is there another that will do justice to both the literal meaning of the words and to the historical context? I believe that there is. Moreover, I believe that this view emerges precisely when we take the words at their face value. The explanation is simply that at this point Jesus Christ moved his ministry

to Galilee precisely because he had not been received in Galilee previously, and it was therefore the Galileans above everyone else who needed him. In other words, Jesus went to Galilee because the Galileans needed the gospel. Doesn't that make sense? I believe that it does. I also believe that it gives a revelation of our Lord's own motivations in his ministry that can speak to us personally.

Regardless of Failure

Let me try to put this understanding of the verses in terms that we can easily appropriate and apply. What do we learn from this insight into the outlook on his ministry that motivated the Lord Jesus Christ? The first thing is this: Jesus had determined to do the will of God for his life regardless of the consequences. That is, he had determined to do God's will regardless of apparent success or failure.

We see that in a very graphic way in the light of Christ's previous rejection by his countrymen. The story of Jesus' initial appearance in Galilee is told in Luke. From Luke we learn that he had been so badly received by the Galileans that he was almost executed at their hands. Jesus had come to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, on the Sabbath. When he went into the synagogue on this particular day to worship, he was asked to take part in the service, as male Jews were often asked to do. He was given the task of reading the Scriptures, so he picked a prophecy from Isaiah that concerned himself. He read, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19; Isa. 61:1-2).

He then began to teach them, beginning with the claim that the prophecy of Isaiah was being fulfilled on that precise day as he began his ministry. He ended with the prediction that most of the people would not receive him. At this point the citizens of Nazareth were so incensed that they led him to the top of a high cliff where they were about to cast

him down to his death. We are told that Jesus simply passed through them and went his way.

This was the kind of reception Jesus had received in his own area of the country, and this would be fresh in his memory at the time of his return visit. Moreover, the favorable reception that he had received from the Samaritans would also be fresh, so that it would be a great temptation for him to simply remain where he was and work there. What did he do? He went to Galilee because he was determined to do God's will regardless of the consequences.

I wonder if we do that. If something does not work, isn't it true that we quickly throw it out and try something else, and that we do the same thing spiritually? If our witness is not readily received, we are quick to shake the dust off our feet and go elsewhere. Here the conduct of the Lord Jesus Christ should be helpful.

We are to keep hunting for effective means of presenting the gospel. No one would question that. Still, we are to learn from Christ's example that even when we have done our best and have not had success in our witnessing, we are to keep on trying.

Let me put it in another way. Your job as a witness to the Lord Jesus Christ is not to convert people. That is God's job. He will do the converting. Nevertheless, you have a job to do, and your job is to bring as many as you can into contact with the gospel. Moreover, you are not to stop doing your job even if the results from your own vantage point seem meager.

Man's Need

The second thing we learn from Christ's decision to go into Galilee is that he was motivated by an acute sense of man's need. He once used an illustration about a doctor to describe his activity. He said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17). It was the need of men and women who were lost, without the gospel, that moved him.

Are you so motivated? Ask yourself these questions: "Whom do I know who is particularly needy? Whom do I know who is in need of physical help? Whom do I know who needs the gospel?" You might gain help along these lines by looking about for the most lonely person you know, the most introverted, the one who is most oppressed with guilt, sin, or distress. Speak to him or her. You might find an amazing openness to the gospel simply because you are (or could be) the only one who has ever taken time to listen to that person and share his problems.

Motivated by Scripture

The final lesson from the decision of the Lord Jesus Christ to enter Galilee is that Jesus was motivated by the specific statements of Scripture and that, therefore, we should be motivated by such specific statements too.

We see this not as much in John's Gospel as in Matthew's. In the early chapters of Matthew the author shows that Jesus' early ministry in Galilee was in direct response to a specific Old Testament prophecy about it. The prophecy is in the ninth chapter of Isaiah, which Matthew quotes as follows: "Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: 'Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned'" (Matt. 4:13-16).

Clearly Jesus knew the Scriptures and studied them for the light they threw upon the course of his ministry. It was in response to this verse and many hundreds of verses like it that he made his decisions.

What does this have to do with us? A person might argue that the Bible does not contain such specific prophecies about what each of us is to do and about the course of our lives. That is true. Nevertheless, the Bible contains principles by which God instructs us how we are to organize our lives, fix our values, witness to others, and serve him. If we will read the Bible and allow God to interpret it and apply it to our own

situation, then we will have the same type of direction that Jesus had and will be able to obey God on the basis of his written revelation.

That is the only way to any geniune blessing in the Christian life. Success, even in preaching the gospel, will not satisfy indefinitely. Neither will martyrdom. We will find blessing only when we allow God to speak to us through the Scriptures and obey him.

Martin Luther was a man who had come to learn this both theoretically and in practical experience. God had spoken to him through Scripture and had given peace to his soul. Scripture had kept him on course both in times of rejection and danger and in times of apparent success. Thus it was a study of Scripture that he recommended to others. On one occasion Luther was asked to autograph the flyleaf of a copy of the German Bible that he had translated, and he responded by writing a small testimony of his experience with this book. He first wrote John 8:25—"Who are you? ...Just what I have been claiming all along." It was a claim on the part of Jesus Christ to divinity. Then Luther added, "They desire to know who he is and not to regard what he says, while he desires them first to listen; then they will know who he is. The rule is: Listen and allow the Word to make the beginning; then the knowing will nicely follow. If, however, you do not listen, then you will never know anything. For it is decreed: God will not be seen, known, or comprehended except through his Word alone. Whatever, therefore, one undertakes for salvation apart from the Word is in vain. God will not respond to that. He will not have it. He will not tolerate any other way. Therefore, let his book, in which he speaks with you, be commended to you; for he did not cause it to be written for no purpose. He did not want us to let it lie there in neglect, as if he were speaking with mice under the bench or with flies on the pulpit. We are to read it, to think and speak about it, and to study it, certain that he himself (not an angel or a creature) is speaking with us in it."

It is true. The Bible is God's Word. In whatever circumstances we may find ourselves, it is not only an adequate source of information; it is also

a treasure, the only absolutely necessary source of guidance for our lives.

Chapter 56.
The Second Miracle

John 4:46-54

It does not matter who you may be, sooner or later you are going to experience great sorrows or even tragedies in your life. You may be rich or poor, a man or a woman, black or white. Tragedy inevitably will become a part of your personal experience and there will be nothing you can do to avoid it.

That is not merely my own opinion, of course. It is a truth that has been recognized by many throughout history. One of the oldest pieces of literature in any language contains an expression of this that has become somewhat proverbial. It is from the Book of Job: "For hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble sprout from the ground. Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward" (Job 5:6-7). The Hebrew of this saying is beautiful; for the two Hebrew words translated by our one word "sparks" are literally "the sons of flame," and the thought is that men are born to endure the fires of this life and eventually perish in the burning.

We know it is true. Psychologists tell us that life begins with pain, as the child, who for the first nine months of its life has rested warmly and comfortably within the uterus of its mother, is suddenly pushed and pulled into a hostile environment in which his first independent act is to cry. The experience is one akin to strangulation as the baby gasps for its life. For a time after birth the mother cares for the baby's needs. Yet, as the child grows up, the years progressively knock away the props of life and the child is forced increasingly to depend on his own resources. He must learn to eat and clothe himself. Eventually he must go to school, then earn a living. In time there will be the failure of his plans and the

dissolution of cherished relationships. There will be pain and sickness. Death will inevitably come to friends and family, and at last the person himself will face his own death and that which lies beyond.

I am not pointing this out to spread gloom. There is enough sorrow in this world without emphasizing it. Rather, I am writing in this way to start us thinking about how you and I will react to such events when they come to us. What will we do? Will we be beaten down by them? Or will we triumph over them in complete victory? The verses we end with show how we can have such victory and how the same solutions can enrich our lives even in the far more abundant times of joy and great happiness.

In Joy and Sorrow

The basis for arriving at such solutions comes from a story in the life of Jesus Christ. It is the story of a rich nobleman whose son was dying and who, out of his desperation, came to Jesus about it. By the end of the story we find that not only had the son been cured but in a far more wonderful way the rich man and his entire family had found a genuine faith in Christ.

The story begins by telling us that "once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine" (John 4:46). It ends with the remark: "This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee" (v. 54). Why do we have this emphasis upon the place where Jesus performed the miracle? Why is this called the second miracle, when obviously many other miraculous things had been done by Jesus previously (cf. John 2:23; 4:45)? Why, in fact, is the former miracle of changing water into wine at Cana mentioned? Quite clearly, this is John's way of telling us that we are to put the two miracles— that of changing water into wine and that of healing the nobleman's son—side by side. In other words, we are to see them in relationship to each other and compare them.

What does the comparison show? In the first place it shows a number of similarities. Both were "third-day" miracles. Thus, the miracle at the

wedding occurred three days after Jesus had left the area of the lower Jordan River to return to Galilee (2:1), while this miracle similarly occurred three days after Jesus had determined to leave Judea to return to Cana through Samaria (4:43). Both miracles contain an initial rebuke to the one who requested it. In the first case it was to Mary, Jesus' mother (2:4). In the second it was to the nobleman (4:48). Third, in each case Jesus performs the miracle at a distance, doing nothing but speaking a word (2:7, 8; 4:50). Fourth, the servants possess unique knowledge of what happened (2:9; 4:51). Finally, each account concludes with a statement that certain persons who knew of the miracle believed. Thus, in the earlier story we are told that "his disciples put their faith in him" (2:11), while in the second narrative we are told that the father "and all his household believed" (4:53).

These points reinforce the need of comparing the two stories. Yet the significant point of the comparison is not in the similarities but in their one great difference. What is the difference? Certainly that in the first the scene is one of joy, festivity, and happiness. The stage is a wedding. In the second the scene is fraught with sickness, desperation, anxiety, and the dreadful shadow of death. One is a picture of joy, the other of sorrow. In comparing the two we are clearly to see that life is as filled with the one as the other and that Jesus, the One who is the answer to all human need, is needed in both circumstances.

One writer has noted: "Jesus is more than equal to either occasion. He has a place in all circumstances. If we invite him to our times of innocent happiness, he will increase our joy. If we call on him in our times of sorrow, anxiety, or bereavement, he can bring consolation, comfort, and a joy that is not of this world."

In pointing to this truth John is further documenting his claim that Jesus is indeed "the Savior of the world"; for Jesus is the Savior of all men, at all times, and in all circumstances.

Growth of Faith

The next fact we are told is that the man who came to Jesus at Cana was a nobleman. This is not the same word that is used in chapter 3 where Nicodemus is described as being a Pharisee, "a ruler of the Jews." The word that is used of Nicodemus is one that denotes preeminence of authority, however derived. In this case, the word is *basilikos*, which is related to the word for king and therefore denotes royalty. The word could even mean that the man was a petty king, but in this context it probably means that he was one of the royal officials at the court of Herod.

Moreover, the man had some means, for he had servants. Here was a nobleman, rich, no doubt with great influence. Yet neither his rank nor riches were able to exempt him from the common sorrows of mankind. Remember, as you think about those in positions of importance or power, that there is just as much sickness among them. And there is just as much of a need for Jesus Christ.

The wonderful thing, of course, is that this man sensed his need and its solution. When Jesus had performed his first miracle by changing water into wine, the miracle was at first known only to the disciples and to the servants who bore the wine to the master of ceremonies. Still, people being what they are, the news must have spread and have created a stir in Galilee. In time, some of the Galileans got to Jerusalem and learned of miracles that Jesus had been doing there. They told about these when they returned. It is part of the same picture that news of what Jesus was doing must have reached even Herod's court, for the nobleman had heard of Jesus and immediately remembered what he had heard when faced with the fact of his son's illness.

News came to the nobleman that Jesus was back in Galilee at Cana where the first miracle had been performed. Leaving home he made the four-hour trip (about twenty-five miles) from Capernaum, where he lived, to Cana. There he begged Jesus to accompany him back to Capernaum and heal his son.

There are two ways of looking at the man's faith at this point. The first way is to be surprised that he was exercising faith at all. Here was a

man who was high in the court, where he doubtless exercised great authority, traveling twenty-five miles to request a miracle from a carpenter. It is true that desperation has driven many men and women to unusual actions, and that therefore we must not find this overly significant. Nevertheless, the man's faith is surprising. That is one way of looking at it. The other way of looking at the man's faith, however, is to look at it in the way in which Jesus looked at it and to realize that although it was real faith it was nevertheless quite weak. The man apparently believed that Jesus was able to heal his son. But he limited Jesus to the place—he thought it was necessary that Jesus should come down to Capernaum—and to a mode of operation. Presumably the nobleman thought that Jesus would have to touch his son to heal him, just as Jairus thought that Jesus would have to touch his daughter to heal her (Mark 5:23) and the woman with an issue of blood thought it would be necessary for her to touch the hem of Christ's garment (Mark 5:28). It therefore became Jesus' purpose to teach the nobleman and to help his faith to grow.

At first Jesus delivered a rebuke. He said, "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe" (John 4:48). That was the equivalent of calling him a curiosity seeker and was perhaps directed as much toward the crowd that had gathered as to the nobleman. It was a test of the man's faith or sincerity. How did he react? Fortunately, the nobleman proved himself to be truly noble, for he was not offended, nor did he seek to justify himself either before Jesus or the others. He simply stood his ground, reiterating his need and humbling himself to receive his answer in whatever way Jesus chose to give it to him.

Here then is the first answer to the way in which we can find triumph or victory in sorrow. It is to *trust Jesus enough to allow him to operate in whatever way he chooses.*

Believing Is Seeing

But there is also a second lesson to be learned, and it was this lesson that Jesus next began to teach him. Jesus taught that *one must believe*

first, then he will see the results. Jesus had said, "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe." This statement was a true description of the thinking of vast numbers of men and women. The world even has it in a proverb, which says, "Seeing is believing." The teaching of Jesus was that in spiritual things the order is reversed and that believing is seeing, for it is only as one believes in Jesus that he sees spiritual things happening. Therefore, Jesus told the boy's father, "You may go. Your son will live" (v. 50). The nobleman was called upon to believe without sight. It was hard, but that is precisely what he did. The story goes on to say, "The man took Jesus at his word and departed."

Needless to say, if it had been a mere man speaking, the belief of the nobleman would have been absurd. No one believes without sight. Yet in spiritual matters it is entirely logical to do so— because we are dealing not with a man but with God. Jesus is God. Hence, to believe him is the most logical thing in the universe.

Moreover, to believe in Jesus is also the most effective way to set one's mind at rest, even when faced with sorrow. For we are told that having believed Jesus the nobleman simply continued on his way. The word used, plus the tense employed (imperfect), suggests that the nobleman believed Jesus so implicitly that he simply picked up his work where he had left it and went on about his business. At any rate, it is obvious that he did not rush home; for although the conversation took place about one o'clock in the afternoon and the journey was only four hours, the nobleman did not get back until the next day. When he did return it was to learn that his son had been healed instantly the day before at the very hour in which Jesus had spoken to him.

What a splendid story this is! And it is all the more splendid in that the man came to such strong faith from such a weak beginning. It is hard to read this story without thinking of that other similar story of the centurion who came to Christ requesting him to heal his sick servant. There are some noted similarities, so much so that some scholars have imagined these to be two versions of the same incident. Yet they are not the same, and the greatest of all differences is to be found in the

attitudes of the two men involved. The centurion had the greatest faith. He said to Jesus, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed" (Matt. 8:8). Jesus praised his faith, saying, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith" (v. 10). Still the centurion had this faith from the beginning, while the nobleman who sought out Jesus in Cana came to the same level of faith in a very short time through Jesus' teaching.

Truths for Everyone

The applications of this story to our own experiences are obvious. I am sure that you have already seen some of them. First, if Jesus acted as he did with this man and if his actions actually had the effect on him that the Bible tells us they did, then surely Jesus is the answer to our own anxieties also. The man came, talked to Jesus, and then went on his way without any tangible evidence that his request had been granted. Why? Because in meeting Jesus and in talking with him, his anxiety evaporated. It can be the same for you. You may be weighed down under great burdens. You may be crying inside. Just come to Jesus. Tell him about it. He will be delighted to ease your burdens and to take the weight of them all upon himself.

The second application is that the experience I have described may be true even though our actually seeing the results is postponed. They may even be postponed until after this life. We witness the death of a parent, friend, or child. We experience sorrow or sickness ourselves. We come to Jesus and find him saying, "I know what I am doing. I am working it all out." The Bible says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). There will always be circumstances in which we will not *see* that this is true. Nevertheless, we are to go on about our business. We may have to pass through the night into the bright day of the next world before we see how our prayers are answered. Still we are to believe and know that Jesus has heard and that he has answered.

Finally, there is fact that these truths are for everyone. That is the burden of this first great section of John's Gospel. What has John done? He has shown Jesus at work in the three major sections of his world—Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. He has shown him with the rich and the poor, with the educated and the uneducated, with Jews and Samaritans, with religious leaders and those who show no religious orientation at all. He has shown him as the "light of the *world,"* "the lamb that takes away the sin of the *world,"* "the Savior of the *world."* In other words, he has shown us that the gospel is for everyone. Thus, the gospel is for you also, whoever you may be.

Jesus is speaking to you when he says, "Come now, let us reason together ... though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool" (Isa. 1:18). He speaks to you when he says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

The Gospel of John, Volume 2

Christ and Judaism (John 5-8)

by

James Montgomery Boice

To him who is indeed that Christ, the Son of the living God

Preface

It has been more than thirty years since I began to study the Gospel of John in a serious way and nearly twenty-five years since my studies of the Gospel began to appear in print. They have been out of print for some time. So it was with much gratitude that I learned of Baker's interest in reissuing them in this revised and attractive version.

When I first preached on John, I was often asked whether I ever found myself running out of ideas as I progressed at such a slow pace. (My exposition of the entire Gospel took eight years.) I answered such questions with the reply that the opposite was actually the case. Rather than running low on ideas or growing stale as a result of the week-by-week exposition, I found myself increasingly stimulated by John's narrative and regretful that in spite of every effort on my part I was still unable to penetrate all the deep truths of the book or to express adequately what I saw. In my studies for this volume, particularly for the comments on chapter 6, I found myself delving deeper into the doctrines of grace as summarized under the five distinguishing points of the Reformed faith (or Calvinism) and was greatly blessed as a result. There is a sense in which the founding of the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology (1974) and later my involvement in the work of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals (founded 1994) had its origin in my work on this chapter.

There have been related blessings too. In the course of preparing this volume I discovered the sermons of Charles Haddon Spurgeon as I had not done previously, and I came to love his ability to handle even the most difficult doctrines pastorally. Consequently, a debt to Spurgeon shows up increasingly from these pages forward.

At times, as in the first volume, I deviate from a straightforward exposition of the text to deal in somewhat greater detail with themes suggested by it. In the previous volume I did this in reference to witnessing and baptism, which I discussed for a total of eight chapters (chapters 1623). In this volume, eight more chapters are similarly spent, first, in regard to the questions of sabbath observance versus the celebration of Sunday as the day of Christian worship (chapters 59-62) and, second, in regard to the doctrine of the Scriptures (chapters 68-71).

The outline of John's Gospel, which I introduced in volume 1 as the basis of the five-volume division of my exposition, is still being followed. Volume 1 deals with the coming of the light of the Lord Jesus Christ into this world (chapters 1-4). Volume 2 deals with the growth of hostility toward him on the part of the religious leaders (chapters 5-8). This is linked to the sabbath question, hence the lengthy discussion of that subject. Volume 3 shows Jesus beginning to call out a people to himself from among Israel, beginning with the calling of the man who had been born blind (chapters 9-12). Volume 4 examines the final discourses (chapters 13-17). Volume 5 contains an exposition of the last events of Christ's earthly life, culminating in his resurrection (chapters 18-21).

The writing of these studies is the most difficult work I do, far more difficult, for example, than counseling, preaching, traveling, or any of the other normal activities that make up the bulk of an active ministry. Yet this is important work. I trust that it will be greatly blessed to many students of God's Word. Others have worked on this volume, particularly Miss Caecilie Foelster, who carefully edited all my early manuscripts and saw them through the various stages of production. May God richly bless their efforts in thus helping to make the divine Word more widely and fully known. I earnestly pray that what is of the human author only may be quickly forgotten. May that which is of God bear much fruit unto life eternal.

To him who is indeed "that Christ, the Son of the living God" be all glory forever. Amen and amen.

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Chapter 57.
Christ and Judaism

John 5:1

The fifth chapter of John's Gospel begins a new section of the book. Like the first major section of the Gospel, this next section extends over four chapters, beginning with chapter 5 and ending with chapter 8. It deals as a whole with the development of opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ on the part of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and with Christ's response to their opposition. The fact that this is a new section is important; for if we recognize the differences between this section of the Gospel and the first four chapters, we will have a lesson for ourselves about how we are to persevere in God's service.

Little is ever accomplished in this life without a firm purpose. Caesar would never have conquered Gaul; Einstein would never have discovered relativity; the United States of America would never have landed men on the moon; nor would many thousands of other great accomplishments ever have been achieved without a firm purpose. Moreover, just as this is true in secular matters, so is it true spiritually. The only difficulty is that many Christians seem to live more by whim than by a firm determination to pursue the will of the Lord; consequently, many lack a firm purpose. We know what this means personally when we begin a work but soon drop it, when we determine to study the Bible every day but end up doing so only for about a week, when we get fired up to witness for Jesus Christ but then stop when we notice the first real sign of hostility.

Why do so many Christians seem to live like this? Why do we lack perseverance? There may be many answers, of course, but there are two main reasons—hostility and the danger of success. It is my conviction that these two dangers faced the Lord Jesus Christ in his determination to fulfill the will of his Father in his life and that we can be helped by studying his reactions to them. Simply put, the first of these dangers emerges in the fifth chapter of John in the opposition of the Jewish rulers to Christ and his teachings and is dealt with there, while the second danger—the danger of success—emerges in chapter 6.

At the end of these chapters, chapters 5 and 6, we find Jesus firmly following the path that God had set before him; namely, the path of the cross.

The Jewish Elite

The fifth chapter of the Gospel begins with a sentence that immediately shifts our attention to a new class of people. John writes, "Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews."
The new class of people is "the Jews," but we must not understand this to mean all of the Jewish people; that is, the term is not meant ethnically. When John says "the Jews" he means the Jewish rulers who had their headquarters in Jerusalem, and it is these primarily with whom Jesus now comes into conflict.

The expression "the Jews" is not at all common in the other three Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These Gospels use the phrase occasionally, most often in the expression "the King of the Jews." But at the most this is only half a dozen times or so. In John the case is quite different. In the fourth Gospel the phrase occurs some seventy times. It is true that in some instances out of this great number of occurrences the term is neutral, or even praiseworthy, as in Christ's statement, "Salvation is from the Jews" (4:22). But generally the term is used critically of those religious leaders who opposed Christ and the gospel. Thus John clearly distinguishes between the Galileans, who were Jewish in the ethnic sense, but whom he does not call Jews, and the Jews of Jerusalem. Moreover, even in regard to Jerusalem he

distinguishes between the leaders, whom he terms "Jews," and others. For instance, the parents of the man born blind were certainly Jewish, but they are not called Jews. Instead, they are said to have reacted in certain ways because "they were afraid of the Jews" (9:22), meaning the religious leaders.

It is these jealous and hostile leaders of the Judaism of Christ's day who are now brought into the picture. According to the first four chapters of John's Gospel most of the major groupings of the nation had already responded to Christ favorably—the disciples of John the Baptist and other Judeans, the Samaritans, the people of Galilee, even (according to the previous chapter) some who were in the service of Herod. The only exception has been the Jewish rulers.

There is probably a historical reason why the Gospel shifts to the conflict between Christ and these men at this point, and this is simply that a number of important historical events had taken place between Christ's last visit to Jerusalem and the visit recorded in the fifth chapter. There is a lapse of time here that John indicates generally by the phrase "some time later." It was during this lapse of time that the events in question took place.

What happened during this period? First, there had been a shift in the policy of Rome toward the
Jewish nation that had greatly sharpened the danger of insurrections and war. The anti-Semite Roman commander Sejanus, working through Pilate, deprived the Sanhedrin of its jurisdiction over capital crimes, with the result that the Sanhedrin had to abandon the Great Hall of Hewn Stone in the temple court and move as a body to the market of Annas on the temple mount. We see the results of this change a year or so later when the Sanhedrin was compelled to come to Pilate seeking the death penalty in the case of Jesus Christ. Second, there was an increase, partly as a result of the Roman action, of Zealot activity leading the more pessimistic among the rulers to predict a time of persecution and suffering. Thus, Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai prophesied the future destruction of the temple, and Rabbi Zadok began a forty-year partial fast for the preservation of Jerusalem that ended only when

the city was overrun by the Roman legions under Titus and destroyed by them. From the biblical point of view the most significant event was the arrest and eventual execution of John the Baptist, who was Christ's forerunner. We notice this by comparing John 3:24, where we are told that "This was before John was put in prison," with 5:33-35, which speaks of the ministry of John in the past tense.

In such a tumultuous period of history it is no wonder that the leaders of Judaism reacted to the emergence of Jesus as a new and potentially dangerous figure. It is understandable that their hostility intensified when he revealed himself to be above their personal interpretation of the law and actually defended his actions by identifying himself with God the Father. Here is a great hostility. Yet Jesus did not allow this hostility to deter him from following the path the Father had set before him.

Do you allow hostility to deter you? If you determine to live for God in the midst of this sinful world or speak a word for Jesus Christ to those who do not yet know him, you can be sure that hostility in some form will come. Perhaps you have already experienced it. Have you allowed it to get you off the track of Christian living and witnessing? If so, you need to get back on the track by following the example of Jesus.

No Bitterness

Jesus Christ did not allow the hostility of the Jewish leaders to deter him from the path that God had placed before him. But, on the other hand, neither did he allow it to produce a bitterness in his outlook on his ministry. Unfortunately, this bitterness has often happened to Christ's disciples, perhaps to you. I have known Christians who have not allowed hostility to get them off course, but unfortunately they have become so bitter that they have greatly limited their opportunities for service and it has darkened their lives.

It is interesting to note, precisely at this point, that this is what some scholars have claimed happened in the early church in reference to

Judaism, and that we even have a reflection of what happened in references such as those in which John critically mentions "the Jews." In other words, some scholars are saying that Christian anti-Semitism has its origins in the New
Testament Scriptures and can be eliminated only when today's Christians repudiate their error at its source.

Let me give you some references that will made this clear. In a recent book a well-known Jewish rabbi, Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser, argues that "the historic roots of Christian anti-Semitism go back to the basic teachings of the New Testament." In another book Rabbi Samuel Sandmel argues similarly, "We Jews figure as villains, all of us or some of us, in much of your Bible. Only very lately has this bothered you extensively and intensively, and the reality has to be faced that some of you are not bothered by this at all."

It is not just rabbis that have been making this point. Actually, the same accusation has been leveled—only in even more forceful language—by Protestants. A. Roy Eckhardt, editor of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* states that "all the learned exegesis in the world cannot negate the truth that there are elements not only of anti-Judaism but of anti-Semitism in the New Testament." He calls for a denunciation by Christians of "anti-Semitic allegations" in John, in Paul, and elsewhere. On other fronts Noel Freedman of the San Francisco Theological Seminary has claimed that the New Testament "is simply an anti-Semitic book." In the foreword to *Judaism and the Christian Predicament,* Union Theological Seminary's Frederick C. Grant has expressed the hope that the reversal of traditional attitudes toward the Jews that he detects in our age "will in time ... involve more than just a formal repudiation of anti-Semitism. It will also include a repudiation of impossible literalism and legalism in the interpretation of the Bible, or the refusal to interpret it at all."

Is this true? Is the New Testament anti-Semitic? One cannot help admiring the vigor with which these writers—both Christians and Jews—are attempting to purge the world of anti-Jewish prejudice. And there can be little doubt that the defeat of anti-Semitism is long overdue.

Nevertheless, at the same time, one must question whether this approach properly represents the biblical view and whether the cure prescribed is adequate. Actually, it is more likely that the cavalier way in which some Protestant exegetes handle Scripture actually breeds an insensitivity to it and consequently sets aside the one sure hope of a cure.

In the first place, it simply is not true that the New Testament is anti-Semitic. It is true that the New Testament contains statements that sound anti-Semitic to modern ears, conditioned as they are by centuries of prejudice. The New Testament speaks of a general failure of the Jewish people in the time of the apostles to believe in Jesus as their Messiah and Savior, and it laments this unbelief. Still, if this is to be judged anti-Semitic, then statements about the failure of Gentiles to believe must be considered anti-Gentile. Actually, the New Testament writers show great anguish because those of their own nation had failed to embrace what was for them the "Good News" of God's action in Christ for man's salvation. At no point in any of the nonbiblical literature of the times does any writer claim, as Paul does (Rom. 9:3), that he would be content to see himself accursed if that would bring about the salvation of the Jewish people.

Critics have imagined an anti-Semitic element in John's references to "the Jews" as those who crucified Jesus. But, as we have seen, this was a political designation for John rather than an ethnic one. He himself was a Jew and was proud, as were the other disciples, of his heritage.

Second, the current judgment against certain biblical strains seems to overlook entirely the positive things said about the Jews in the New Testament, even by those writers who are judged to be most anti-Semitic in their statements. Paul is considered a prime offender because of his sharp polemic, particularly against the Judaisers who were subverting his hard-won churches. But it is Paul who most clearly spells out the advantages of Judaism. "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision?" he asks. "Much in every way! First of all they have been entrusted with the very words of God" (Rom. 3:1-2). "Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the

covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ" (Rom. 9:4-5). This certainly is not anti-Semitism. On the contrary, it shows an unusual sensitivity to God's dealings with the Jews in history and great appreciation for the spiritual inheritance available to all men through them.

Moreover, if the Jews as a whole have refused to believe in Jesus, this is remarkable to the New Testament writers precisely because of the way God worked through the Jews in the past. It is this that gives rise to extensive comment. In Paul's mind, the fact that God seems now to be working through the Gentiles, calling out another people, the church, is so unexpected and so astonishing that he properly calls it a "mystery" kept secret since the world began.

Finally, the New Testament also points to great future privileges for Israel, when Israel as a whole will receive her Messiah, even as many individual Jews receive him now. Eckhardt argues that Jesus is not the Messiah of Israel because he is not the kind of Messiah Israel was and is expecting. But this is faulty logic. One might as well say that he is not the Savior of the Gentiles because most Gentiles do not want a Savior. The Christian must argue against both these conclusions, maintaining that Jesus is indeed the Messiah and Savior in spite of people's rejection of him, and that it is precisely people's unawareness of this need that most reveals it. Moreover, it would even be a correct reading of Paul (Romans 9-11) and John (Revelation) to claim that God has preserved the Jewish people throughout history so that they can bear a great witness to him in the end days.

Our Example

The conclusion of all this is that Jesus Christ did not respond to the hostility of the leaders of Israel toward himself with bitterness any more than he allowed their criticism to deter him from his path to the cross. In his reaction we have a pattern for our own.

How are we to avoid these two dangers? There is only one answer. It is by keeping our eyes upon the Lord Jesus. John Bunyan pictured it graphically in *Pilgrim's Progress* in a scene in which Pilgrim escapes death from two ferocious beasts who are chained to either side of a path.

He escapes by walking directly toward a light that is held before him. Christ is our light. His light shines on the path we are to follow. The Bible admonishes us to lay aside everything that might hinder us in our purpose and to run life's race "fix[ing] our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

Chapter 58.
The Third Miracle

John 5:2-9

It is almost commonplace today to observe that the "system" often seems to help those who need it least while it is hardest on the destitute. We speak of this economically when we say that the rich get richer while the poor get poorer. Those who are well educated often get better educations. Those on the treadmill of unemployment and relief often sink deeper and deeper into the welfare morass. In one sense, some people even apply the principle in the area of religion when they say—wrongly, of course—that "God helps those who help themselves." So deeply is this ingrained in the modern mind that people try to tell me that the last statement—"God helps those who help themselves"—is in the Bible.

Actually, the opposite is true. For one of the great principles of the Word of God is that God, the Almighty, helps the helpless. The gospel is for everyone. But that only means that it is to you and me, who cannot help ourselves spiritually, that the offer of salvation comes.

The Need of Humanity

The fifth chapter of John contains one of the great biblical expressions of this principle. It is the third miracle that John records in his Gospel, specifically the miracle in which Jesus Christ enables a lame man to walk. There are probably two reasons why John records it. First, it was this miracle that marked the beginning of angry disbelief and hostility toward Jesus on the part of the Jewish leaders. It is to this theme that the Gospel now turns. Second, there is the fact that the story illustrates how Jesus came to the weak and helpless, and saved them. This aspect of the story is particularly apparent at the beginning of the account of the hostility that developed between Jesus and the Jewish leaders; for the leaders were the ones who should have accepted him and among whom we would have thought he should have done his most extensive work. But they were insensitive, and Christ moved instead among the masses.

John tells us that all this happened when Jesus returned to Jerusalem for a feast. This would have been one of the great religious feasts of Israel, though we do not know which one. Apparently he was alone, for none of the disciples is mentioned as having been with him. While in Jerusalem Jesus passed by the pool of Bethesda, which John tells us was distinguished by five collonades, where he saw the lame man.

It is interesting to stop at this point to note that the pool of Bethesda, mentioned here by John, is now known to archaeologists. There was a time when critics of the Gospel were giving the book a very late dating and were arguing in part on the basis of this reference that the author of the Gospel did not really know what Jerusalem was like in Christ's time. They said no one had ever heard of a pool by this name and, besides, no one has ever even uncovered a five-sided pool from antiquity. Now, however, the name "Beth Eshatain" has emerged from the copper scroll found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. It gives us the name Bethesda. And what is even more important, the pool itself has been found. Actually, the pool of Bethesda (now known as the pool of St. Anne) is two twin pools each surrounded by colonnades. Thus, there are five collonades—four of which surround the pools and one that divides them. This is the pool of which the apostle John was writing when he recorded that in

Christ's day sick people gathered there believing that an angel intermittently stirred up the water, and that whenever this happened the next person to step into the water would be cured.

It is a pitiful picture, as John relays it. But it is far more pitiful when we realize that he is including the description to dramatize the helpless and woefully hopeless condition of the human race.

"Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed" (5:2-3). What a comprehensive description that is! It is really a twofold description. First, the people are called disabled; that is, they are said to be without strength to help themselves. Then, their disability is spelled out by three more terms. John calls them blind, lame, and paralyzed.

This is the human race as it stands apart from the grace of God through Jesus Christ. How does God view people before that act in which he places new life within them? One answer is in Romans 5:6, which tells us that it was when we were "still powerless" that Christ died for the "ungodly." The American Standard Version of the Bible and the Roman Catholic Confraternity translation both translate this verse to say that it was when we were "weak" that the love of God was shown to us. The Williams and Goodspeed translations say "helpless." Phillips uses the English word "powerless." Beyond this, the lexicons tell us that the Greek word means "infirm, feeble, unable to achieve anything great, destitute of power among men, sluggish in doing right." In other words, God tells us that it was when we found it impossible to do anything for ourselves spiritually that Christ died for us.

When we use the word "impossible," we must be careful to indicate in what sense the word is meant. For instance, there are cases of conditional impossibility in which we mean that something is impossible unless something else should happen. I might say that it is impossible for me to pay all this month's bills, but that is a conditional impossibility since it might happen that I would receive an unexpected

check that would cover them. I would be using the word in the same way if I should say that it is impossible for me to take on an extra job, *unless* I drop one that I am already doing; or that it is impossible for me to work with this noise, *unless* I wear earmuffs. I could extend this list indefinitely, for there will always be an infinite number of things that are impossible, *unless* something else should happen.

In quite another category, however, are those impossibilities that will remain impossibilities because they can never be affected by circumstances. It is impossible for a thing to be true and false at the same time and in the same relationship. It is impossible for black to be white. It is impossible for something to exist and not exist at the same time. God places disabled man in this category of impossibilities when he declares that it is impossible for man to do anything by himself that will satisfy God.

We find these truths summarized in the many verses that tell us what man cannot do spiritually.
We read, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he *cannot* understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Jesus asked the people of his day, "Why is my language not clear to you?" then answered, "Because you are *unable* to hear what I say" (John 8:43). Peter wrote that, unaided by God, a person *cannot* cease from sin (2 Peter 2:14).

Blind, Lame, Paralyzed

In case any should question the full import of what John is teaching at this point, he goes on to three additional terms to characterize the great multitude at the pool of Bethesda. They also characterize us. The first term is "blind." Jesus spoke of this blindness in chapter 3 when he told Nicodemus, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (3:3). He spoke of it again when he said to the religious leaders (after he had healed a man who had been born blind), "If you were blind [i.e., like the man who had been born blind but who, nevertheless, had believed], you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you

can see [which they could not do], your guilt remains" (9:41). The religious leaders thought they could see, but they were actually blind about spiritual things, as they proved by their refusal to believe on Jesus. The man who had been born blind knew he was blind, but Jesus gave him spiritual as well as physical sight, which he proved by confessing Jesus as his Lord and by worshiping him (9:38).

The second word is "lame." It follows the other, for how can a person walk the narrow way that leads to life if he is blind? The story of the paralytic man who was brought to Jesus by his friends who lowered him into Jesus' presence on a mat through an opening in the ceiling illustrates our spiritual lameness (Matt. 9:1-2; Mark 2:1-5; Luke 5:17-21). The man could not come on his own. He needed someone to bring him to Jesus. Jesus spoke of man's inability to walk in a spiritual sense when he declared, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (6:44).

Finally, John also tells us that humanity is "paralyzed." Have you never heard someone say, "Oh, I ought to get up and do so and so, but I feel so tired I can't raise my arms. I feel paralyzed"? Well, that is precisely the case in spiritual terms. The difficulty is not with knowing that there is a job to be done. We should be righteous. We should be like Jesus Christ. It is just that when we think about such a standard we seem paralyzed. Certainly, we could say with the apostle Paul as he writes of himself apart from the power of God at work in his life, "For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out" (Rom. 7:18).

Grace

It is a desperate picture if we take it seriously. Yet it is the glorious prelude to the gospel of God's grace, for it is to such people—blind, lame, and paralyzed—that Christ came.

We read that the Lord Jesus Christ walked into that vast collection of sick people and saw there a man who had been disabled for thirty-eight years. No one recognized Christ as he moved among them, for they were blind spiritually. Besides, they had their hopes set on the

superstition about the moving of the water. No one rose to meet him, for they were lame. No one reached out a hopeful hand; they were paralyzed. Yet Jesus moved among them and healed this most helpless of sinners.

"Do you want to get well?" Jesus asked him.

The lame man answered, "Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

Jesus commanded, "Get up, pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was made well and did as Jesus commanded.

That is how God saves sinners today. If our salvation depended upon our recognizing him or reaching out a hand toward him, who would be saved? The answer is: No one. Yet instead of waiting for us to come—instead of waiting to "help those who help themselves"—Christ comes to us and speaks the words that give life.

In Harry Ironside's commentary on this passage, the well-known Bible teacher tells a story from the early days of his ministry. He was in San Francisco at the time, and it was his custom then to take some of the Sunday school children down to the beach on Washington's birthday. On one particular morning, as he did this, he found the beach covered with all sorts of wreckage. At first no one knew where it had come from. But later, when they had returned to the city, they learned that it had come from a great liner called the *Rio de Janeiro,* which had been on its way to America from China. Trying to make the San Francisco harbor in the fog the previous evening, the ship had run upon a rock and been broken in pieces. Although hundreds of people were drowned in this accident, some escaped. The newspaper told this story about one of them. A young American journalist on board ship had both his legs broken. He lost consciousness, and while in that condition had been thrown into the water. The water probably brought him back to consciousness and he began to float. He floated for hours. Finally that utterly helpless man was drawn out of the water by a rescue party. As

Ironside read that, he saw in the story a marvelous picture of God's grace to sinners. Some swam for hours before they were picked up, strong and hearty men. Others were drowned. But this man had no ability to swim; he was helpless. Yet he was saved. No wonder Jesus told us that "the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10).

No Argument

He came to find you. Will you argue that you are not helpless, that you are not blind, lame, or paralyzed? If you will argue God's verdict upon your spiritual capabilities, you will not be saved. The Bible teaches that God will not debate his verdict upon the spiritual condition of the human race. God declares that the creature is not the Creator. You are not as perfect as the Lord Jesus Christ, and that makes you a spiritual paralytic or any other name for a handicap that you may wish to apply to it. Yet—this is the glory of the gospel—it is for such that Christ died.

In the seventeenth century, an English bishop named William Beveridge wrote these words: "I cannot pray, except I sin; I cannot preach, but I sin; I cannot administer, nor receive the holy sacrament, but I sin. My very repentance needs to be repented of; and the tears I shed need washing in the blood of Christ." Bishop Beveridge was right. But as soon as I am able to accept the fact that I am ungodly man by nature and therefore completely unable to rise to meet God by any inborn effort, then I can also know that my sins have been dealt with in Christ and that he gives new life to all who trust him for their salvation.

Chapter 59.
Lord of the Sabbath

John 5:9-16

The ninth verse of chapter 5 has brought us to an ominous note. The story of the healing of the disabled man at the pool of Bethesda has just

been told, but at this point we read: "The day on which this took place was a Sabbath."

This does not sound too serious to us because the observance or nonobservance of the sabbath is not too big an issue in our time. Nevertheless, the issue was serious in Christ's time and, what is more, actually loomed larger and larger as Christ's ministry unfolded. On the grounds of this issue the Jerusalem authorities eventually plotted to destroy him. It is also true, however, that in another sense the issues are serious in our time too, even though, strictly speaking, most persons are not struggling with the question of how to worship God on Saturday. The importance of the issue emerges when we ask these questions: Why is it that Christians generally worship on the first day of the week, on Sunday, rather than on the Jewish sabbath, which is Saturday? Is God displeased with worship on either one of these days? Why do we not observe both? Or even, why observe either? Does worship on a given day of the week have anything to do with true religion?

These questions lie behind the subject matter of the next four studies, each of which deals with the sabbath-Sunday question. More specifically, the chapters deal with the problem that arose between Jesus and the Jewish authorities, the purpose and history of the Jewish sabbath, the significance of the Christian observance of the first day of the week, and the question of how we as Christians should celebrate it.

Grace or Regulations?

We must begin, however, with the real significance of the sabbath question, and that is: Is the Christian to be ruled by grace or is he to be under regulations? The special gravity of this problem is set forth in a quotation that shows Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer's view of the sabbath question.

"The distinction between the reign of law and the reign of grace is at no point more sharply drawn than in the question of the observance of the seventh day of the week or the first day of the week; for these two days are symbolical of the dispensations to which they are related. Likewise,

at no point is personal religious prejudice, which is born of early training and sentiment, more assertive than on the sabbath question. It was His liberal teaching on the observance of the sabbath which, more than aught else, provoked the wrath of the Jewish leaders against Christ, and, it may be observed, there is no religious subject today which so draws out personal convictions and opinions. The reason is evident. Few have really comprehended the exact character and principle of grace. To many, Christianity is a system of human works and character building from which merit accrues. And the observance of a sabbath day presents extraordinary opportunities for the exercise of meritorious works."

This, of course, was precisely the situation in Christ's day, as also in ours. God had commanded a sabbath for the Jewish people, but the leaders had perverted it by transforming it into a system by which they thought they were earning grace by good works.

The need to observe the sabbath is found in the Ten Commandments. God said, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates" (Exod. 20:8-10). This basic principle was further developed in other Old Testament books and was applied to all areas of Jewish life, even to the way the fields were treated. Thus, Jeremiah warns that the failure of the people of his day to properly observe the sabbath would result in the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians: "Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem. Do not bring a load out of your houses or do any work on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your forefathers. ...But if you do not obey me to keep the Sabbath day holy by not carrying any load as you come through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem that will consume her fortresses" (Jer. 17:21-22, 27).

This was God's teaching for Israel concerning the sabbath. Moreover, it was taken so seriously by him that we even read that the people remained captive in Babylon for seventy years so that all the broken sabbaths on the land might be paid for (2 Chron. 36:21).

The difficulty lay in the fact that the leaders of Israel had added man's regulations to God's law, and this had reduced the observance of the sabbath to the worst forms of legalism. For instance, the law said that a man was not to travel on the sabbath day (Exod. 16:29). "But what is traveling?" asked the scribes. "What constitutes a journey?" In answering this question they then developed the concept of a sabbath day's journey, which was roughly a thousand yards. So a man could walk that far on the sabbath, but to walk more than that was sin. If, however, a rope was tied across the end of a street, then the whole street technically became one house; and a man could walk a thousand yards beyond the rope. Or if he deposited enough food for a meal at any given place on Friday night, on the next day he could walk to it, eat his meal (thereby technically establishing a home), and then walk a thousand yards more. If he were clever enough at this, I suppose that a determined man could walk halfway across Palestine.

Or, take the matter of carrying a burden. The text in Jeremiah prohibits this. But what is a burden? Is a handkerchief a burden? The answer was yes if it was carried, but no if it was worn as an article of clothing. So, obviously, the way to get a handkerchief out of an upstairs drawer and into a downstairs drawer was to take it out of the one, tie it around your neck, go downstairs, and then place it in the new location.

The same logic also worked in this way. Take a man who is out walking. He spits. Is that work? It depends on what happens to the saliva. If it goes into the dirt and makes a slight furrow, then that is plowing and it is work. But if it hits a rock, no work is done. So, under this system, being religious on Saturday more or less depended on which direction you spit.

All this was abhorrent to the Lord Jesus Christ. So he determined to rescue Israel from her enslavement to these man-made sabbath

regulations and to restore a proper balance by showing that the sabbath was made for man rather than man for the sabbath. In this way he paved the way for a fuller revelation of God's grace in his coming death and resurrection.

The Example of King David

We want to come back to the discussion of this theme in John's Gospel, but before we do we need to turn to the parallel discussion of the same issue in Matthew. The reason is that Matthew's Gospel, more than John's, was written to Jews and therefore develops this subject in a fuller form.

Jesus had been walking through the grain fields with his disciples on the sabbath, and his disciples were hungry. The disciples leaned over and gathered a few heads of grain. They rubbed it in their hands, releasing the chaff, and then ate the ripe grain. Unfortunately, nearby Pharisees saw it and objected that it was not lawful for the disciples to do this on the sabbath; for, according to their view, this was harvesting. Jesus answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:3-8).

In this reply there are three principles. The first is contained in Jesus' remarks concerning King David. Every Jew knew the story to which he referred. David had been anointed by God to be king over the people, but they had rejected this anointed king in order to follow Absalom, David's rebellious son. David was forced to flee from Jerusalem for his life. He had no food. Being without food, he and his followers entered the tabernacle and took the "consecrated" that was always there and ate it. Every Jew knew that only the priests were allowed to enter the

temple. Only priests could eat this bread. Nevertheless, God did not strike David dead for doing it. Why? The explanation is that God considered the anointing of David to be more important than the law about the bread. And it was useless and hypocritical for the people to be pretending to serve God through the minute laws of the tabernacle worship when they were rejecting God's king. It is insulting to God to act out ritual if the heart is far from him.

This clearly applied to the situation in Christ's day. For it was also useless and hypocritical for the scribes and Pharisees to be insisting upon their little sabbath rules while they were actually turning their back on God's anointed Messiah, the Lord Jesus. There he was! He was greater than the temple! So if they rejected him, even the sabbath, backed by all the Old Testament laws, was meaningless.

Formalism

The second principle in Christ's reply is that the formalism practiced by the Jewish authorities actually blinds one to real need. In other words, it hardens people in their relationship to others. Jesus noted this when he remarked that they did not know the meaning of the statement, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

Here were men who were being punctilious in the observance of their interpretation of God's law, and yet we read that because Jesus was not obeying their regulations they were determining to kill him. Moreover, they would even try to keep their own regulations while they did it. The arrest of Jesus came at the time of the Passover, the most holy week and day in Israel's calendar. The difficulty these men faced was that they wanted to dispose of Jesus without defiling themselves for the Passover. So they held a conference to see how they could fit it all in. They concluded that it could be done if they could follow this order. There would be a trial by night (which was illegal—but not so illegal, they argued, as failing to keep the Passover). Next there would be an official trial by day, in the early morning hours. There would be an approach to Pilate (they needed to make sure that no one actually went into his quarters, for that would defile any Jew and prohibit him from eating the

Passover). Finally there would be the execution. The whole thing would be over by noontime, and everyone involved could then go and worship Jehovah. So they marched along the little path of their own regulations. When it was necessary they stepped out just enough to murder God. Then they stepped back in and went on with their formalism.

Let this horror teach us how terrible it is to have a religion of rules and ceremonies when the heart is far from the Savior. No horror is so great that it has not been practiced by someone at some time in the name of religion. And nothing is so bad as the tendency of the human heart to seize on some outward, useless, and hypocritical ceremony and follow it to the letter without turning at all to God.

In contrast to this deadly effect of formalism on the lives of the Jewish leaders, Jesus simply showed by his actions that people were far more important than rules and that the showing of mercy is a far higher obligation upon a follower of God than regulations. Thus, in Matthew, after Jesus' discussion with the leaders, he simply healed a man with a withered hand (Matt. 12:9-13), while in John he provoked the same issue by curing the disabled man (John 5:1-16). The Pharisees wanted to use these men to trap Jesus. Jesus, out of his great compassion, wanted to heal them.

These verses from Matthew also show a third principle. It brings us back to the account of the conflict in John. The third principle Jesus states is that whatever their little rules and regulations might be, he, rather than they, was the Lord of the sabbath. He established the sabbath. He was God. This was his claim. Thus, he could alter the sabbath, suspend it, or even remove it as the case would be. In the same way today, Jesus makes a claim to be the Lord of your sabbaths, your habits, your aspirations, your abilities, your life. We are faced with the same fact of human nature that the Pharisees faced; namely, that it is so much nicer to try to pile up a collection of human credits than to allow Jesus to manifest his lordship in our lives. The lordship of Jesus Christ? That is Christianity. The other is only religion.

The Committee

At this point the story in John's Gospel ends with a very dark sentence. It had begun on an ominous note—"the day on which this took place was a sabbath"—but by now the skies that were threatening had become so black with clouds that they contained murder. We are told, "So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath day, the Jews persecuted him" (v. 16).

What does this mean? Well, it means that the Jews of Christ's day did what organized religion often does. They formed a committee. The purpose of this committee was to find a way to trap Jesus. We would call it a lynching committee. We do not know exactly what was said, of course, for the hearings of this committee were conducted behind closed doors. Nevertheless, we have a pretty good idea from what happened afterward. One of the rabbis must have said, "Let's get him on the question of taxes. We'll ask if he considers it right to pay taxes to the Roman government. If he says yes, we'll laugh him to scorn. For we'll say, 'What kind of a Messiah is this who tells us to knuckle under to the Romans?' But if he says no, we'll have him then too. For we'll simply go to the Romans and say, 'You have an insurrectionist on your hands.'" They put the question to Jesus. But Jesus destroyed their arguments by replying, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Matt. 22:21).

The Pharisees went back to their meeting. Someone else said, "Let's get Jesus on a moral issue. Let's find a woman who is committing adultery and then drag her off to Jesus. We'll say, 'What are you going to do about it?' If he says, 'Let her go free,' we'll accuse him of disregarding the law, for Moses said that an adulteress should be killed by stoning. But if he says, 'Do what Moses commanded; kill her,' then we will laugh in his face: 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you a brick.'"

"Why all this viciousness?" one commentator asks. "Why this desire to destroy the meek and lowly Jesus? Why this murderous attempt to do away with God? The answer is here in the sabbath question. They

wanted rules, they did not want God's grace. They wanted human merit. They did not want the simplicity of divine pardon. They wanted to do something for themselves. They had it all worked out. They would make a show of keeping a day as sacred, while their hearts wallowed in lust and their minds conceived schemes of greed. Their avarice could swell to outrageous proportions, but the sabbath would be their cloak. Keeping a day would be their mask."

The Pharisees and scribes saw that Jesus was destroying this dream castle they had built. So they devised means to do him in. In a sense, of course, they succeeded. At least they put him to death. They killed him. But he rose from the dead and—think how ironic and significant this is—not on their useless sabbath of death, but on the first day of the week, soon to become the new day of joyous Christian celebration.

Chapter 60.
The History of the Sabbath

John 5:9-16

Many devout Christians would agree with everything I have said up to this point about the Jewish perversion of the sabbath in the time of Jesus Christ, but they would still insist that the seventh day of the week rather than the first day of the week is the proper day for Christian worship. In fact, whole denominations teach this doctrine. And in addition to those who belong to these denominations and believe this teaching, there are undoubtedly others who observe Sunday but who are nevertheless confused about the issue and sometimes wonder why they worship on Sunday.

This study will be far-ranging. For some it may appear too complex or detailed. I believe, however, that if we study these themes, we will profit immensely both in understanding the unique dealings of God with

the Jewish people and in appreciating the special and God-given character of the Christian's Sunday.

No Sabbath before Moses

The earliest mention of any sabbath, either in the Bible or in secular writings, occurs early in Genesis. It is found there even before the fall of Adam. We are told that "by the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (Gen. 2:2-3). Obviously, this verse appeals to those who believe that everyone should worship on the seventh day, and I must admit frankly that this is a possible support for their argument. Certainly, if we had no other references to the sabbath in Scripture and found that men as a whole observed it, that would be a reasonable explanation for the practice and a basis for it. On the assumption that this basis exists, Sabbatarians claim that the setting apart of the sabbath day by God in the Garden of Eden established a law that is binding on every member of the human race.

The difficulty, however, is that Genesis 2:2-3 does not exactly say this and, what is more, there is ample evidence to the contrary both in secular records and in Scripture. What these verses say is that God blessed the seventh day because on it he ceased from the work of creation. But it does not say when he sanctified it; that could have occurred later. Nor is there any record either here or elsewhere of any actual sabbath observance by anyone before the time of Moses. There is evidence of the offering of sacrifices, of prayer, of circumcision by Jewish people before Moses' day—but not of sabbath keeping. Besides, there is no evidence that any nation other than Israel ever kept the sabbath at any time—either before Moses' day, after his day, or currently.

This argument from silence has its limitations, of course. An argument from silence always does.

Nevertheless, we cannot overlook the fact that the sabbath is not even mentioned in the Book of Job in spite of the fact that the whole discussion throughout the better part of forty-two chapters turns on the many details of human obligation toward God. Job is concerned with a historical period several hundred years before the exodus and thus throws additional light on our discussion relating to this period.

For Jews Only

Having looked at the major text cited in support of Sabbatarianism from the early history of the race, we must now turn to passages that tell us when the sabbath *was* instituted and for whom.

The first is in Nehemiah. Nehemiah had been instrumental in furthering a great revival among the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity, and in connection with this revival he had been active in encouraging a special service of worship and rededication. In this service the priests led the people in praising God. They said about God's relationship to Israel, "You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good. You made known to them your holy Sabbath and gave them commands, decrees and laws through your servant Moses" (Neh. 9:13-14). Here the establishing of the sabbath is linked to the giving of the law at Sinai. It is implied that the sabbath itself was not known or observed before that time.

The second passage is from Exodus, which takes us back to the time at which the law concerning the sabbath was first revealed to Israel. Exodus says: "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Say to the Israelites, "You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy. Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. The

Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested"" (Exod. 31:12-17).

In these verses the sabbath is described as a sign between God and Israel. The fact that it is between God and Israel is important; it is mentioned twice. Moreover, a direct address to Israel either by name or by second person pronouns occurs nine times. It is difficult to see how anything other than prejudice could apply these words to any nation other than Israel or miss the fact that the sabbath was a part of the law and as such was intended to distinguish the nation of Israel from others.

The third passage makes the same point. In Ezekiel God tells us of his special dealings with the Jewish people: "Therefore I led them out of Egypt and brought them into the desert. I gave them my decrees and made known to them my laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. Also I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so they would know that I the LORD made them holy" (Ezek. 20:10-12). Once again the verses reiterate that the sabbath was made known by God at Sinai and that it was exclusively a sign for Israel.

We might add at this point that only a sabbath applied to Israel living within the fairly fixed geographical bounds of Palestine either makes sense or is possible. Why? Because the sabbath obviously begins at different times in different parts of the world due to the different time zones. Thus, it is impossible for people all over the earth to observe it simultaneously, as Sabbatarian theory would seem to require.

Perhaps the final and most conclusive evidence for this special giving of the law of sabbath observance to Israel lies in the interesting fact that the sabbath, if known, was not observed even by Israel before God's special revelation concerning it. The evidence for this is in the fact that on the way to Sinai God gave Israel a preview of what was coming concerning the sabbath by means of his instructions concerning the gathering of manna. It was the fifteenth day of the second month after

their departure from Egypt, and the people were hungry. They complained to Moses. God told Moses that he would send bread from heaven in a form that was later called manna. They would receive it each day for six days; but then on the sixth day, they were to gather double, for on the next day, the seventh, there would be no provision. The people did this, not knowing precisely why there would be no bread on the seventh day. On the sixth day, therefore, after they had gathered double manna, Moses explained in full, saying, "This is what the LORD commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.' ... Bear in mind the the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out." We read, "So the people rested on the seventh day" (Exod. 16:23, 29, 30).

The point of all this is that the events of this chapter, which I have just summarized, cover eight days, ending with the first observance of the sabbath in history. And if someone should argue that the first day was also a sabbath, a close examination of the chapter will show that this was not so. For on that day, according to verse 1, the people journeyed from Elim to the wilderness of Sin, a distance of over twenty miles. Clearly this was a far cry from the sabbath day of rest that was given to the people a week later.

Perhaps it is also worth noting here that Lewis Sperry Chafer, who writes on the sabbath question in his book entitled *Grace,* wisely points out that even in Israel the sabbath was not always celebrated on the seventh day of the week and that, because of the Jewish calendar, it was often the case that certain kinds of work were done on all days, even on Saturdays. He writes: "The sabbath, but for necessary exceptions, was the seventh in a series of seven, whether of days or years. Of necessity it often fell on other days of the week as well as on Saturday. There were at least fifteen sabbaths which were fixed dates in their given month, and these sabbaths fell on those particular dates regardless of the day of the week.... Again, certain working days were established days.

The lamb must be taken on the tenth day of the first month and be killed, roasted with fire, and eaten on the fourteenth day of the month. Likewise, Abid sixteenth could in no wise have been a sabbath for that date was appointed as the beginning of harvest (Deut. 16:9; cf. Lev. 23:15). All these labors would have been direct violations of the sabbath law; yet these ceremonies were appointed for certain predetermined dates, and from time to time must inevitably have been in conflict with the predetermined sabbath."

We conclude that the sabbath was for Israel alone, that it was neither instituted nor observed before the exodus and the giving of the law at Sinai, and that even in Israel the sabbath itself was not always observed on the seventh day of the week. Even in Israel, God was not interested in the seventh day as an inflexibly recurring seven. For it was true then, as now, even though in that day Israel was under law and the sabbath was a divine regulation, it is useless to worship God by rules if the heart is far from him.

End of the Sabbath

Finally, I want you to see how completely and abruptly the practice of sabbath observance changed with the coming of the gospel of Christ. Some have objected that Jesus himself observed the sabbath, which is true. But the attempt to insist on the observance of Saturday because Jesus observed it comes from the failure to realize that the reign of law gave way to the reign of grace at his death. Jesus was born a Jew, born "under the law." During his lifetime he kept the sabbath, although, of course, in the way God intended it to be kept rather than in the way the scribes and Pharisees dictated. He was a Jew. Yet at his death law as a system binding upon God's people passed away. Paul declares that through his death God blotted out "the written code, with its regulations against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:14).

Did you know that in Acts the word "sabbath" is found only nine times and that not once is it spoken of as a day observed by Christians? The first chapter speaks of it in the phrase "a Sabbath day's walk" (v. 12). In

chapter 13 the word occurs four times in describing how Paul used the sabbath day for his evangelistic ends, going into the synagogue to preach to the Jews who were assembled there (vv. 14, 27, 42, 44). Later chapters give similar references (15:21; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4). Nowhere is it even suggested that God's people met on the seventh day or even regarded it with any special affection or attention.

Finally, in the epistles we are told explicitly that believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are freed from all such observances. Thus, we find Paul writing, "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Col. 2:16-17). Or again, writing to the Galatians, "But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you" (Gal. 4:9-11).

"It is significant, then, that in all the Epistles, wherein the believer's obligation under grace is set forth," as Chafer says, "the only use of the word *sabbath* is under absolute prohibition concerning observance, and that it is there held to be in conflict with the most vital and superseding elements of grace."

God's Grace

We need to stop at this point. In the next chapter we are going to move in a freer and much more positive way to a discussion of why Christians worship on Sunday instead of on Saturday and what associations this day has for them. But before we do that we need to say one thing in reference to those who insist that God still requires a sabbath-day observance. It is true that we are told in Scripture that we are not to be bound by days. But it is also true that we are not to judge those who are so bound. Paul writes to the Romans, therefore, that although it is wrong to be bound by days, nevertheless, it is possible for an uninformed Christian to observe them even, from his point of view, to

God's glory (Rom. 14:5-6). In dealing with our Christian brothers in such matters we are to deal in great love.

At the same time and without the least pride, we will be able to profit from our knowledge and so flee with horror from a legalism that would bind us to days. "When we are thus free," one writes, "the Lord will possess our Mondays and Tuesdays, our Wednesdays and Thursdays, our Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, and all our days and weeks and months and years because he has bought us and possesses our hearts in simple grace."

Chapter 61.
The Day of the Resurrection

John 5:9-16

In my study at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia I have a volume called *The American Book of Days.* It is a compendium of information about America's holidays, festivals, and anniversaries arranged like a volume of daily readings—several anniversaries or holidays for each day of the year. It is hard to read it without getting the point that, no matter what the day of the year may be, that day is important for someone. We all have our special days—a birthday, the day we became engaged, our wedding day, the day of our promotion, even the anniversary of the death of some special friend.

In this chapter we want to deal with the most important day of all. It is a great day, and the best thing about it is that it does not occur merely once each year; it occurs weekly. That day is Sunday. It is important because it is the weekly remembrance of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and because, for those who will have it so, it marks a new relationship between the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and those who believe in him.

A New Day

I make the point that Sunday is a new and joyous day because there are some within the
Christian church who try to make Sunday into something somber and serious, which it was never intended to be. They try to make it into a Christian duplication of the Jewish sabbath. In some cases these persons even go so far as to abandon the *celebration* of Sunday altogether and instead *observe* Saturday. This, according to the New Testament, is to fall from grace into law, which means falling into bondage to the observance of "days and months and seasons and years" (Gal. 4:10).

In speaking about this subject I have found that many persons are helped to see the difference between Saturday worship and Sunday worship by realizing that God never intended the observance of the Jewish sabbath to go on indefinitely. In fact, in the heart of the Old Testament, in the Book of Psalms, there is a prophecy concerning the time at which the sabbath observance would end and actually give way to the entirely different Christian celebration. In Psalm 118 we are told: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (vv. 22-24).

There is nothing in the Bible itself to explain the image—"the stone the builders rejected"—but there is an explanation of it in Jewish tradition. At the time of the building of Solomon's temple all the stones for the temple were cut to shape at the quarry and were then transported to the temple site where they were assembled without the sound of metallic tools. The achievement of this goal required great care in the cutting of the stones, and the architect's plans were closely followed. One day a stone that did not seem to fit the building arrived at the construction site. The builders laid it aside, and it was soon forgotten. Some time later the builders came to a place in the building where a special stone, a keystone or cornerstone, was required. They sent down to request it from the stonecutters in the quarry, but they were told that the stone they requested had already been sent up. After a while the old, rejected stone was found. This was the one that was missing. So the proverb,

"The stone the builders rejected became the capstone," passed into the language.

In Psalm 118 this proverb is quoted, but it is quoted with a prophetic cast. It is used as an image to picture Christ's coming death and resurrection. Jesus is the stone that the leaders of Israel refused. Yet he has become the cornerstone of God's righteous dealings with mankind. The day of the recovery of the stone is the day of the resurrection. Thus, this day, the day of the resurrection, is the new day that the Lord made and in which all who know him as Savior shall be glad.

We know that this is a proper interpretation of Psalm 118:22-24 because it was the interpretation given to it by Peter when he spoke before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem after the Lord's resurrection. He said of Jesus: "He is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:11-12).

The conclusion is that the Christian Sunday, the Lord's Day, has no relationship whatever to the Jewish sabbath. We do not celebrate Sunday because God once set aside the seventh-day observance for Israel. We celebrate Sunday because on that day God did a marvelous new thing in raising the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead.

Eleven Important Events

I wonder if you have ever noticed that beginning with the resurrection, every event recorded in the New Testament that had important religious significance fell on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day. This has been pointed out by Lewis Sperry Chafer in his book *Grace.* There are eleven events.

1. The first and most important of these eleven events is that on the first day of the week *Jesus Christ arose from the dead.* This great fact is mentioned in all the Gospels and is referred to constantly throughout the rest of the New Testament.

I often have said in speaking about the resurrection of Christ that the celebration of the first day of the week by the earliest Christians, rather than the observance of the Jewish sabbath, is itself one of the great proofs that the resurrection occurred. It is a remarkable fact that although most of the early believers were Jews and although they had long been in the habit of worshiping on Saturday, nevertheless another day was chosen as the day of Christian gathering. This could not come about either by whim or by chance. Only the actual, historical resurrection of Jesus Christ can account for it. It is one of the great evidences for the resurrection. On the other hand, the fact that there was a Sunday resurrection is in its turn evidence of the new character of the age in which we live. Thus, we pattern our lives on the resurrection life of Christ and not on the principles of Mosaic legislation.

Chafer writes, "When Christ arose from the dead, Christianity was born, and the new creation was brought into existence. There is nothing in the old order for the believer. He stands on resurrection ground. He belongs only to the new creation. God is faithful to all that He has wrought in Christ and He, according to His Word, will not suffer the child of the new creation to go back and celebrate the beginning of the old and fallen creation from which His child has been saved through infinite riches of grace. If the children of grace persist in relating themselves to the old creation by the observance of the sabbath, it is evidence of their limitations in the knowledge of the Word and will of God; it is to fall from grace."

2. On the first day of the week *the Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven for the first time* after his earthly life. We find a record of this in John 20:17, in which Jesus says to Mary Magdalene, "Go... to my brothers and tell them 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Where did Jesus spend the forty days between the events of this Easter morning and his final ascension into heaven nearly seven weeks later? We must not think of him as darting around the countryside trying to hide behind rocks or trees and then appearing suddenly for a few moments in what are the recorded appearances of the Lord to his

disciples. During those days Jesus passed freely between earth and heaven, the first time being early on the first Easter morning. Do you remember how he said to Mary, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father," but then a very short time later allowed the other women to touch him and that evening invited the disciples to do so also (Matt. 28:9; Luke 24:39)? It is an apparent contradiction, but the answer that seems right to me is that between the two occurrences Jesus did ascend to the Father. This was the fulfillment of the Old Testament illustration of the wavesheaf that was brought to the Lord before the harvest. Jesus had to ascend to present the value of his atoning death before the Father in fulfillment of Leviticus 16 (cf. Hebrews 9). Thus, the announcement of a completed atonement is also a part of the resurrection day's significance.

3. On the first day of the week *Jesus appeared to the disciples for the first time while they were in the upper room and there bestowed peace upon them.* Peace is one of the three results of justification that are listed by the apostle Paul in the fifth chapter of Romans. He speaks of peace, access to God, and rejoicing. All these Christ gave to the disciples. They had not been at peace. They were not aware of God's presence. They certainly were not rejoicing, for we are told that they were gathered together in secret for fear of the Jews. Jesus changed each one of these states of mind by his presence.

4. On the first day of the week *Jesus Christ first broke bread with the disciples.* This happened twice, once in the presence of the two disciples, whom he had overtaken on the road to Emmaus, and once in the upper room with all the disciples at the end of the first Lord's Day. These were the first postresurrection observances of the communion service.

5. On the first day of the week *Jesus opened the understanding of his disciples* so that they might understand all that the Scriptures had taught concerning him.

We read in that magnificent twenty-fourth chapter of Luke that on that first resurrection day, when the Lord met the Emmaus disciples who were on the way home, he began to "open the scriptures." Later, when they were eating together and he began to break bread, they understood who he was. Finally, in the upper room Jesus "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." He told them, "This is what is written: 'The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem'" (Luke 24:45-47). We follow Christ's lead when we read and interpret the Scripture on Sunday.

6. On the first day of the week *Jesus commissioned the disciples to the task of world evangelism.* He said in John 20:21, "As the Father sends me, I am sending you." We read in Luke 24:48 that he said, "You are witnesses of these things." We are commissioned to go into this world with the gospel, even as Jesus was commissioned.

7. On the first day of the week *Jesus breathed on the disciples, imparting the Holy Spirit to them* (John 20:22).

8. On the first day of the week, seven weeks after the resurrection, *the Holy Spirit descended from heaven at Pentecost* and began his ministry for the entire age of the Christian church. Today we look to the Spirit for the imparting of spiritual gifts and skills and for the work of correction, reproof, and conversion as he works through the preaching and teaching of the Bible.

9. On the first day of the week *the Holy Spirit directed Paul to gather the believers together and preach to them.* The account is found in Acts 20 and concerns a period of Paul's life when Paul was pursuing missionary work at Troas. It is an interesting chapter. In the sixth verse of the chapter we are told that Paul spent seven days in the city; that is, he was there for each of the seven days of the week, including a seventh day and a first day (this is, a Saturday and a Sunday). There was obviously an opportunity to choose between either of the two days, but we are told, "On the

first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people" (v. 7). This is another indication of the normal pattern of the early Christian observance.

10. *The first day of the week was established by Paul as the day on which the Corinthian believers were to "set aside in keeping with [their] income*" (1 Cor. 16:2). In other words, it was the day on which offerings were to be taken and dedicated to the Lord's work.

11. Finally, on the first day of the week *the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to the apostle John on the island of Patmos* and gave him that great revelation of himself in all his present heavenly glory. The same... revelation also outlined his plans for the future, for the church age and for that which will follow his coming again.

A Present Pattern

These eleven important events, all of which occurred on the Lord's Day rather than on the Jewish sabbath, show us the importance of the day of the resurrection for the church in this age. Not only do they show us the importance of this day and indicate that this is the proper day for Christian worship, but they also give us our pattern for the present Christian celebration. Everything that we do in church on this day is based on these eleven great events. These are: the gathering of ourselves together, the reading and interpretation of the Scriptures, the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, the collecting of offerings, the observance of communion, and above all the remembrance and worship of the One who died for us and rose again. We do not do these things by accident or by whim. This is God's pattern. We follow it out of thanksgiving for what God has done for us through the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Finally, we observe the Lord's Day as God's great weekly reminder that we are not under law in our relationship to the Lord. We are under grace. When a Christian falls from grace, what happens to the Christian? He does not lose his salvation. That is not what the phrase

means. To fall from grace is to fall into law. To fall from grace is to fall into bondage to man-made regulations.

Let us live in the full sunshine of God's grace, which is our right as members of God's new creation. We have been called by grace. We have been redeemed by grace. We are justified by grace. We are sanctified by grace. God operates constantly by grace. He is our gracious God.

Chapter 62.
How to Celebrate Sunday

John 5:9-16

How should a Christian celebrate Sunday? This is the question to which the three preceding studies on the sabbath and the Lord's Day have been heading and for which we have now laid sufficient groundwork. How should a Christian celebrate Sunday? The simplest answer to that question is indicated in the very name that is given to it in the Bible. It is the Lord's Day. Hence, it is to be lived in whatever manner will most honor and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

One commentator has written, "The conscious effort to promote God's honor is more important than the forms by which we try to do so. Some will use one method, some another; but in either case it is the Godward intention that matters. And whatever means we adopt, the test of our genuineness will be the measure in which gratitude and praise are the distinguishing marks of our lives.... We may not all confess our faith in the same terms, or worship according to the same rites, or govern ourselves according to the same discipline; we may not find it easy to cooperate in common tasks: but age after age men who could not agree in other things have united to praise God with a single voice. Our hymnbooks are still the greatest manuals of Christian unity."

It does not follow from this, however, that all forms of worship or all attitudes toward the Lord's Day are equally valid or even equally useful in promoting God's honor. Consequently, it is worthwhile asking in a slightly more specific way: Just how can a Christian best and properly celebrate the Lord's Day? The answers to this question obviously must be far from any form of rules or legalism and must clearly recognize that in any individual case the Christian is ultimately answerable to God alone for how he or she celebrates it.

Only for Christians

First, however, we must make it clear that the day of the resurrection, no matter how it is celebrated, is for believers only. As the sabbath under the law belonged to the nation Israel and not to any other of the gentile nations, so, in the same way, the new day of the resurrection belongs in grace only to those who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit. We must not force those who are not yet Christians to observe it.

I am aware as I say this that this principle cuts across an attitude that has long prevailed in English-speaking countries and that many will wish to defend it. But I want to say as kindly as I can that in my opinion the desire of many Christians to force non-Christians to keep Sunday is misdirected and in some cases quite harmful. From my own selfish point of view I am quite glad that there are Sunday "bluelaws" in some parts of America. In fact, when I see the harm that is done in some areas of Philadelphia as the result of the liquor traffic, I could wish that the bars were closed permanently and that the money wasted in drinking was used for the family involved or in the education of young children. Still, this does not have anything to do with the Christian Sunday, and any attempt to force non-Christians to observe it in a Christian way is unbiblical and harmful.

Why? Lewis Sperry Chafer, whom I have quoted frequently in these studies, provides the explanation in these words: "The unsaved sustain no relation to the Lord's Day, since that day belongs only to the new creation, and therefore the pressing of the observance of a religious day upon the individual who is unsaved, is misleading in the extreme; for it

tends to the utter confusion of the gospel of grace. God is not calling on the unsaved to keep a day to which they could in no way be related. The issue between God and the sinner is the one issue which the new gospel of grace has raised and imposed. It is a question as to whether he will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ unto forgiveness and eternal life. The person who observes a day while rejecting Christ as Savior, is no nearer salvation or acceptance with God than he would be otherwise. That supposed merit, gained by keeping a day, may be the one thing that hinders him from discovering Christ as the Savior for a meritless sinner. Men are not saved by any works whatsoever, and any teaching which misdirects them at this point is 'another gospel' and subject to the anathema of God (Gal. 1:8)."

None of us would think of forcing baptism or communion upon a person who has not trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. In the same way, the celebration of the first day of the week is given to help a person remember the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and the only person who can keep that day in a way acceptable to God is the person who believes that Jesus died for his sin and that he has been raised from the death of his old self into newness of life through Christ Jesus.

Joy

How then should a *Christian* observe Sunday? Or, more correctly, how should a Christian *celebrate* Sunday? The first answer comes in one form from that famous first question of the Westminister Shorter Catechism. The question asks: "What is the chief end of man?" The answer given to it by the Old Scotch Covenanters was this: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." *Joy* is to be the first characteristic of the Lord's Day.

Like everything else associated with the Lord's Day this too has a foundation in the events of that first resurrection Sunday. In Matthew's Gospel, in its account of Christ's resurrection appearances, the first word on the lips of the risen Lord as he greeted the women who were returning from the tomb was, "Greetings" (28:9). The word is *chairo*,

which literally means "Rejoice!" Jesus told the women to be glad. They were to be happy. This was the day that the Lord had made and they were to rejoice and be glad in it.

If this is so—and it is—then let us be done with the long faces and solemn demeanors that so often characterize the people of God on the Lord's Day. And let us be done also with the type of worshiper who comes to church only to go home. Do not come if you do not enjoy the preaching of the Word and the response of the congregation in word and in song. In the early days of the church the apostles did not have to go around ringing doorbells to get people to come out to the service. They did not have to maintain everymember visitation plans to renew flagging interest in the worship. In fact, the opposite was true. We read in the second chapter of Acts that at this period at least all the Christians "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, the breaking of bread and to prayer. ... Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Act 2:42, 46-47).

These were happy Christians. Other people liked to be with them, perhaps most of all because they were happy. Friendships developed. Then, on the basis of these friendships, the Lord moved and added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Have you ever thought that your attendance at church on Sunday and your conduct while there are important in the conversion of non-Christians? Look at it like this. Imagine a man—or woman—who is alone in the city and who drops by your church some morning or evening. He has a problem and it seems that there is no one to help him. Suppose he goes in out of desperation and finds only a handful of miserable people who mumble the hymns and then begin to look at their watches as the minister preaches. What will he think? He will think that there is nothing to interest him there. There is no life, no answer to problems. He will conclude, rightly, that those who are present are present only out of a sense of duty or routine. On the other hand, if he

enters to find the church packed with people who obviously enjoy the worship, who sing as well as they can and take notes on the sermon, he will conclude that even if he may not understand what it is all about, still there is something to it. He begins to pay attention. And God uses his heightened awareness to lead him to the conviction of sin and conversion. This has happened many times, and there are people in my own church today for whom this is a testimony.

May I suggest that you are not really celebrating Sunday at all if you do not enjoy it.

Activity

The second important characteristic of the Lord's Day should be *activity.* Think of the first Lord's Day. It was clearly a day of activity: the women on the way to the tomb, the appearances of Jesus, the return to Jerusalem of the Emmaus disciples, the sharing of experiences, communion, the Lord's commission. It is possible, if you have been working hard for the other six days of the week, that Sunday might have to have the characteristic of a "day of rest" for you. But this is not an integral part of the Lord's Day. The sabbath was the day of rest. If you need to rest, try resting on Saturday. The Lord's Day should rightly be a day of activity.

Note what Chafer says: "The Lord's Day is not a day for selfish entertainment or amusement. It is not a day for idleness and rest. Its privileges should be, and will be, preserved by all who delight to do His will. It becomes an opportunity for many who are held by secular work during the days of the week, to offer the fullest service of prayer, worship, and testimony which belongs to their Lord. The instructed Christian no longer labors to be accepted of God, which was the obligation under the law; but he, being accepted in grace, labors to glorify his Lord who saves him. He has ceased from his own works, and though ceaselessly active, is working in the power and energy of the Spirit."

This does not mean, of course, that any old activity will reflect the fullest significance of the day. You may mow your grass, if you wish. You are not under law. But this does not have very much to do with Christ, nor does it help to express your joy in his resurrection. Other types of activity are significant.

The first is worship. I know it may strike some persons as strange to speak of worship as an activity; for many people conceive of worship in a passive sense, that is, sitting in a pew and letting the words of the day run through one's head like water. But this is a travesty of real worship. Jesus Christ said that real worship is done "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Truth involves content. Thus, worship is above all else an active, rational activity. It must engage the mind.

Why do we have Scripture readings in the speech of the people instead of in Hebrew, Greek, or Latin? Why are the words of the music in common speech? Why does a sermon stand at the heart of each service? The answer is, to engage our minds.

"We must therefore beware of all forms of emotional, aesthetic or ecstatic worship in which the mind is not fully engaged, and especially of those which even claim that they are superior forms of worship," writes John R. W. Stott. "The only worship pleasing to God is heart-worship, and heart-worship is rational worship. It is the worship of a rational God who has made us rational beings and given us a rational revelation so that we may worship him rationally, even 'with all our mind.'"

The second highly significant activity that ought to characterize the Lord's Day is our witness. Jesus Christ revealed this characteristic of the day when he instructed the women, "Go to my brothers," and later informed the disciples that they were to carry the good news of his life, death, and resurrection into all the world. Do you do that on Sunday? You can do it on any day, of course. It is of the essence of our day that anything done on Sunday can also be done (and should be done) on other days also. But do you at least bear a witness on Sunday? This is a day to invite your friends to go with you to hear

God's Word proclaimed. At the least it is a day on which you should teach your children what you know about Christ.

Expectation

I have already said a good bit about the proper Christian celebration of the Lord's Day. It is for Christians only. It is to be characterized by joy. It is to be filled with activity. There is one thing more: it also should be characterized by a great spiritual *expectation.*

I love Sunday. And one of the reasons why I love Sunday is that I never know in advance what will happen. As I leave my house on the way to the church I never know precisely whom I will meet or what will take place. I do not know who will be present or who will respond to the preaching. I never plan messages to preach at problems that I imagine to be present in the congregation, and yet it is often the case that what I say is used of the Lord to speak precisely to some problem. Lives are changed. What is more, not infrequently that day is the turning point in someone's entire spiritual experience.

Do you go to the company of God's people with such expectation? If you do, it will increase your joy and cause you to work even harder. You will thrill to God's grace. And you will know in a personal way the burden of these words that summarize most of our Sunday activity: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31); "be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tim. 4:2); "pray continually" (1 Thess. 5:17); "be joyful always" (1 Thess. 5:16); "stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Chapter 63.
Is God Silent?

John 5:17-23

In our study of John's Gospel, we come to the first of a series of discourses by Jesus, recorded in John 5:17-47. It is rightly first, for it deals with that problem in religious thought that is itself rightly first in theological thinking. How can a person know God? And, supposing that it is possible to know him, how can the things said about God by those who claim to possess such knowledge be verified?

A Contemporary Question

These are very important questions, particularly in the intellectual climate of the twentieth century. In our century many thinkers are saying that the questions of how one can know God and how that which is said about him can be verified have no answer.

Some maintain that there is no answer because God himself never speaks to answer them. This is the position of a man like Ingmar Bergman, the filmmaker, for instance. Sometime ago I heard this story about him told by Os Guinness, a brilliant young intellectual formerly associated with the work of L'Abri Fellowship in Switzerland. According to Guinness, Bergman had been listening to some music by Stravinsky and while listening to it had a vision. He imagined that he was in a great nineteenth-century cathedral. He was wandering around and came to a portrait of Christ. Suddenly Bergman realized the importance of this painting. So he went up to it and shouted, "Speak to me! I will not leave this cathedral until you speak to me!" There was no answer, of course. Christ said nothing. So the film that Bergman produced that same year, in which a number of characters despair of ever finding God, is called *The Silence.*

The silence of God is a problem, however, even for committed Christians. Take the example of suffering. The world is filled with suffering, but generally God does not seem to hear men's cries in suffering or alleviate their anguish. Thus, one writer who addresses the problem from a Christian perspective writes questioningly, "Earnest and thoughtful men face these realities, and have ears to hear that cry; and their indignant wonder finds utterance at times in some such words as

those of the old Hebrew prophet and bard, 'Doth God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?'"

The other way in which our contemporaries argue that the questions about knowing God have no answers is in the view that religious language is mere symbolism. It is "God Talk," as they say in many of our seminaries today. It is meaningless. This attitude differs from the first one in that, while the first says that God is present or may be present but is *silent,* the second attitude affirms that even the idea of *God* is meaningless. God is not there, and so religious terms have no rational value.

We can illustrate what this means by the ways in which a little phrase such as "God bless you" is used by non-Christians. On the lips of a Christian the sentence has meaning. It is a prayer that the God who created the world and the individual and who died to redeem him in Christ will keep and enrich his life. But what meaning can the phrase possibly have on the lips of a non-Christian newscaster, for instance, a man who merely ends his program with the quip, "Well, good night, everybody. See you tomorrow night at 6:00 p.m., and God bless"? In this form the phrase does not have rational content. It is used only for its emotional or psychological value. In other words, it is used only because it creates a good feeling in the listener. Many are claiming that this is all that is accomplished by any religious talk. It has manipulative value, but there is no real meaning to it.

Another way of expressing this same thought is in the words of Edward Gibbon, author of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* Gibbon wrote of the first Christian century that all the religions of the world were regarded by the common people as "equally true," by the philosophers as "equally false," and by the magistrates as "equally useful." In this system, a system that, incidentally, seems to be reproduced in our day, all truth is relative and religious statements in particular are meaningless.

Against these views Christianity holds a unique position. Christians believe that God has spoken, that he has spoken clearly, and that what

he has said is true. This is the point of Christ's first discourse in John's Gospel. It has two main parts. In the first part (vv. 17-30) Jesus teaches that a man can know God because God the Father is revealed in God the Son. In the second part of the discourse (vv. 31-47) Jesus gives evidence for this claim, pointing out that his testimony is substantiated by a series of other God-given witnesses. We want to begin to look at the opening part of the discourse in this study.

Father and Son

The first statement that Jesus makes is that he is one with the Father in all the Father's actions. He says it negatively and then positively. First, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees his Father doing" then, "because whatever the Father does the Son also does" (v. 19). This is a claim to divinity, to identity with God. It is an assertion that everything God the Father does, Jesus does; and everything Jesus does is also done by the Father. The conclusion of the matter is that Jesus is God.

But there is more to the statement than this. For when Jesus began his discourse with the claim "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working," he was not only suggesting that the Father was working with him in all the actions performed during his earthly life, he was also saying that the Father had been working with him and he with the Father in all their actions previously. In other words, Jesus was turning the minds of his Jewish listeners back to God's work from the beginning of creation, and he was claiming to have been a part of that work also.

This is an important point in our understanding of who Jesus is, for it is not just enough to think of him in the particular time period in which he lived on this earth. In one of my earlier writings I told a story that illustrates what we need to do if we are to understand him properly. In the summer of 1962, a friend and I made a trip around the Mediterranean Sea that eventually brought us to Luxor, in upper Egypt. We were there to see several of the ruins, particularly the great temple of Luxor, built more than 3,000 years ago by Amenophis III. There are

great columns in this temple, all about a dozen feet in diameter and reaching sixty to eighty feet into the sky. Our attention was attracted to one column near the edge of the excavations on the top of which there was a small house. We asked our guide how it got there. The old man answered that before the excavations had reached this area, there was a farmer living on the outskirts of the modern city of Luxor who had been looking for a solid foundation on which to build his house. He scratched about in the sand and eventually came upon what he believed was bedrock. He built his house there. In time, as the wind began to blow around the sides of the house and push the sand away, which it does in the desert, the farmer found that he had built his house not upon bedrock, as he had supposed, but upon a piece of hand-hewn rock. Later he realized that the rock was part of a column, and still later he discovered that it was a standing column. By this time the excavations had reached his area, the ground was taken away, and eventually his house was left standing on the top of the column where we saw it.

This is an illustration of some people's misunderstanding of the Lord Jesus Christ. They will acknowledge that he was a great man and will even claim that their lives are built upon him to some degree. To them he is a great teacher. This is true, of course. But although it is true, by itself this view is as misleading as the view of the Egyptian farmer who thought that he was building his house on bedrock. To have a true understanding of Jesus Christ a person must push aside the thousands of years of human history and catch a picture of him existing with God the Father and working with God the Father from eternity.

Obedience

The second point that Jesus makes concerning his relationship to the Father is that his identity with the Father also involves obedience. It is a matter of the will, which means that the mind of the Father and the mind of the Son are united. We must not think that when Jesus claimed to be able to do nothing, except what he saw the Father doing, he was saying that he was something like a robot, a zombi, who carried out the directives of the Father without thinking. This is not at all what he was

saying. Christ is a person. He has a personality, including an intellect and feelings. He faced temptations, real temptations. There were discouragements. Nevertheless, in nothing did he ever disobey his Father. He obeyed him, and he obeyed willingly.

This is what he wants you to do, in one sense, or rather what he enables you to do when he saves you. The trouble with us is that we are the opposite of Jesus Christ at this point. We are not interested in obeying God. We are interested in doing our own thing. We want to run our own lives. We want to be "god" to ourselves. Jesus was not like that, for everything he did he did out of love for God and out of obedience to him.

Christ's third claim was that he was one with the Father in love. Jesus had said that everything he did he did in unity with the Father. He showed that this unity of action was based on obedience. But then, as a third claim, he also went on to show that this was a unity based on love: "For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does" (v. 20).

Is it not wonderful to know that at the heart of God's nature there is love? How do we know that the nature of God is love? I know that the Bible teaches this. It says so explicitly in 1 John 4:8, 16. But how do we know, apart from the Bible? The answer is: We know that God is love only because of the nature and actions of the Lord Jesus Christ who is both God and love. Someone will point to the beauty of creation. But if you do that, you are only proving that God is a God of order. The creation reveals nothing about love. If you argue that some of the things God has created are useful to men and, therefore, reveal God's concern for them, I will point out that other parts of creation are not useful and are even destructive. Love has to do with a personality. It is a characteristic of persons. So how do we know that God has a personality and that his personality is characterized by love? Only through Christ. Jesus Christ loved us and gave himself for us.

Life and Judgment

Finally, there are two more statements that Jesus makes regarding his relationship to the Father. He says in verse 20, "For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these." The "greater things" are those that are described in the next verses. They are, first, that the Son gives life to whom he pleases and, second, that the Son will be the judge of men on the Father's behalf. He states the first claim by saying, "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it" (v. 21).

This was an appeal to the Old Testament that any knowledgeable Jew would have recognized.

The Old Testament taught that only God could give life or raise the dead to new life. In Deuteronomy 32:39 God says, "I myself am He! There is no god beside me. I put to death and I bring to life." First Samuel 2:6 says, "The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up." When the Syrian general Naaman came to the king of Israel seeking a cure for his leprosy because he had heard that Elijah could cure him, the king of Israel thought that Naaman was seeking cause for a quarrel and replied in despair, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life?" (2 Kings 5:7). Throughout the Old Testament it is the same. The giving of life—whether life in physical birth, spiritual life, or the life of the resurrection—is God's prerogative. Consequently, when Jesus claimed to be able to give life he was also clearly claiming to be God.

The same thing is true about judgment. Every Jew knew that one day God would unleash his final judgment. Deuteronomy 1:17 declares that "judgment belongs to God." This too was God's prerogative. So when Jesus claimed to be the One who would actually carry out the judgment of the Father, he was claiming (no less certainly than in his other statements) that he was God.

Put together, these statements set forth Christ's claim that Jesus is God and acts with God from the beginning of all things to the end, from creation to the final judgment, from eternity to eternity.

The Way

The final verse in this section tells us that God the Father has committed judgment to Jesus so "that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father" (v. 23). How do we honor the Son? Above all by acknowledging that he is who he says he is and submitting to him and to his teaching. John R. W. Stott has written on this point, "If Jesus who thus taught with authority was the Son of God made flesh, we must bow to his authority and accept his teaching. We must allow our opinions to be moulded by his opinions, our views to be conditioned by his views. And this includes his uncomfortable and unfashionable teaching."

This also includes Jesus' teaching about salvation. Sometime after the events recorded in John 5,
Jesus said that he was going to the cross in order to give his life "a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). He said toward the end of his life, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Are these things true? They are if Jesus is who he said he is. If he is God, they have to be true. He is the way, the only way, to the Father. Do you believe it? Do you honor him in his teaching about salvation?

Finally, do you honor him in his teaching about the Christian life? He taught you how to live. The Bible is full of his teaching. Do you attempt to follow it? It is not only your duty if you are a Christian; it is the only sensible course for any man or woman.

Chapter 64.
Possessing Eternity in Time

John 5:24-27

If we are to judge by television shows today—which, incidentally, is not a bad way of judging what is on most people's minds most of the time—then certainly many people are concerned about life. One of the most

popular programs ever to appear on television is *This Is Your Life.* One of the great afternoon moneymakers is *Love of Life.* Even the commercials get into the act when they argue, "You've got a lot to live," and then offer something to help you live it better.

A concern with life and its qualities is basic to men. Unfortunately, the promises being offered in our day for an abundance of life are inadequate, and even the best of these solutions fades into insignificance when compared to the great offer of life that is presented to us by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Apparently matters were not so different in the past either, for men and women were just as concerned with life then as now. This state of affairs undoubtedly led John, the author of the fourth Gospel, to speak of life and of Jesus as the source of life many times. For instance, in the opening verses of the letter he wrote, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (1:4). In the third chapter he records the conversation with Nicodemus about the new birth. This is a discussion of life. In speaking to the Samaritan woman Jesus offers "living water." The theme occurs again and again in each of the great discourses. Finally, in the first of the two conclusions to John's Gospel, occurring in chapter 20, the author of the Gospel writes, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (vv. 30-31). According to this last verse, the desire to see all men enter into the life of God was one of John's main purposes in writing. It is also one aspect—and from one point of view even the major aspect—of Christ's coming to earth to save men.

This theme is discussed at some length in the verses that are now before us, verses 24-29 from the fifth chapter of John. In discussing life these verses take us through the entire scope of the believer's experience with the Lord. First, in verse 24, Jesus is quoted as saying that God gives life initially; that is, God acts first in placing spiritual life within the individual whom he is drawing to himself. Second, verses 25 and 26 say that in this present time, after we have become Christians, God gives

abundance of life through Christ Jesus. Third, verses 28 and 29 speak of a special manifestation of that life in the resurrection of our bodies. These verses deal with a divine life that God gives freely, and they teach that it is possible to live that life now.

The Gift of Life

The first point of these verses, then, is that the possession of divine life begins with God's action rather than man's. In other words, life is not a reward for believing. It is the other way around. Life comes first; a person believes afterward. He believes because God has first placed his life within him. The verse says, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (v. 24).

I must admit, of course, that many preachers have taken this verse in the other sense. They have taught that the phrases represent a temporal sequence so that a person must first hear and believe, then, as a result of his believing, come into the possession of life. This is not right. In the first place, no sequence is involved at all. In John's vocabulary "hearing" is the same thing as "believing." It means to hear with the heart. The point of these two phrases is that hearing the words of *Christ* and believing *God* are identical. This is even the main point of the discourse.

Second, the tense of the verb "have" is present rather than future. If the possession of eternal life were the result of believing, then the verse should have a future verb. It should say, "Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me *will have* eternal life." Actually, the present tense of the verb is used to indicate that the one who believes does so because he already has the life of God within him.

A chapter later Jesus expresses precisely the same teaching negatively when he says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (6:44).

The third and conclusive reason for taking John 5:24 in the sense I have been indicating is that this is the teaching of the Word of God as a

whole. Take the case of Abraham, as an example. What did God do when he called Abraham? Did he look down from heaven and say, "Let's see now, perhaps I can find a man who has a little bit of goodness in him, perhaps a little bit of faith. Can I find something to work with? Ah, yes, there's a person who has something. Abraham! He has faith. I'll start with him." Not at all! The Word of God tells us that Abraham was no different from the rest of his contemporaries (Josh. 24:2). They were devil worshipers. So it was an act of pure grace when God called one man out of the rest. Not one of the people then living in Ur of the Chaldees knew anything about the true God. But God came to Abraham in such a blaze of glory, as Stephen relates (Acts 7:2), that Abraham immediately obeyed the divine call. God always comes first, and when he comes to a person, that person follows.

Abraham's Descendants

Unfortunately, while it is true that many persons will admit this in the case of others, there will always be some who will seek an exception for themselves. This was true in Jesus' day, as in ours. In Jesus' day the argument went like this. "Granted," his opponents would say, "that Abraham was called when he was a devil worshiper and had nothing in himself to commend him to God! Granted that truth. But how does it follow from this that the same is true for those of us who are Abraham's descendants? Certainly our descent counts for something." When this objection was raised, Jesus answered it by pointing out that God is concerned with spiritual rather than physical descent. Thus, while it is true that those who argued this way may have been descendants of Abraham physically, it was just as obvious that they had not descended from him spiritually, for all of Abraham's spiritual children would believe in Jesus. He concluded, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here.... You belong to your father, the devil" (8:42, 44). Where does spiritual descent come from? The only answer is that it comes directly from God.

We see this in the case of Abraham's immediate descendants. The Jews were claiming to have a special position with God because they were

descended from Abraham, but they had overlooked the fact that Abraham had given life to more than one son. Isaac was the child of promise. But before Isaac there had been Ishmael. What about him? Clearly God had chosen Isaac, thereby demonstrating that he is the sole source of life and that he does not choose to impart that life to everyone.

There might have been some—there undoubtedly were in Paul's day—who would have argued that God made his choice on the basis of the worthiness or unworthiness of the mother. They would have pointed out with great glee that although both Isaac and Ishmael were sons of Abraham, only Isaac was Abraham's son by Sarah. The other—they would have said it with contempt—was the son of the Egyptian slave girl Hagar.

Is that the reason for God's choice? We have only to pass down to the next generation to see the answer, for when God makes his next choice he makes it between two brothers, born of the same Jewish mother. And, lest anyone try to introduce the question of age as a factor, he sees to it that the two boys are twins. Moreover, just to make sure that no one can argue that the choice was made on the basis of the moral character of the sons, God announces his choice when they are still in the womb; in other words, before either Esau or Jacob had a chance to do anything that was good or evil.

Once again the choice lay entirely in the heart of God. God gives blessing to whom he chooses. He gives life to whom he chooses. There is just no possible human way of accounting for his ways.

Here is the way Paul presents the argument in Romans 9:

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are

regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, *"The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."*

verses 6-13

Moreover, this is the way God always works. When did God call Moses? The answer is, when Moses was merely a baby floating in a basket on the waters of the Nile. When did God choose John the Baptist to have faith in himself and eventually to be the forerunner of the Messiah? The answer is, before he was born, as was announced both to his mother Elizabeth and to Mary, the mother of the Lord. When did Christ call most of his disciples? When they had first come seeking him? No, rather when they were fishermen practicing their trade. That is the way he calls you. God calls through different means, of course. It is often through preaching. Sometimes it is through the life or witness of a Christian friend. Sometimes he uses a radio program or a book. But whatever the means, the point is that God calls first. What is more, he places the new spiritual life within the individual so that, being awakened to the call of eternity, the one who is the object of that call can hear him and respond, believing.

Life Abundant

We must not think, of course, that this initial call of God is the whole story. There is also the present life of the believer and the life of the resurrection, which is future. Jesus goes on to speak of these two further aspects of life in the verse following the one we have been studying.

Verses 25 and 26 declare, "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself." Here the reference to the

"dead" is to those who are spiritually dead, as in the verse that goes before. But the verb that introduces the word "life" is future, rather than present. This means that in this verse Jesus has in view the increasingly abundant present life of the one who believes in him. The order is this. First, God plants his life within the one whom he desires to become his child. Second, because of the new life within, the child now hears the Word of God and believes. Third, the child increasingly enters into the experience of that life by believing. So Jesus is saying, "The one whom I have called is to live now in an abundant way."

Is your life abundant? It is possible to be a Christian and miss the abundant life; many do. Still, it is your privilege to enter into it increasingly as you permit Jesus to change your life daily.

Resurrection Life

Finally, in verses that we are going to return to more extensively in our next study, Jesus also speaks of future life, referring to the resurrection. He has spoken of the initial gift of life, in which a person becomes a believer.

He has spoken of life in the present. Now he turns to the future. "Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (vv. 28-29). According to these verses, the life that is given in the mo- ment of spiritual regeneration will have its true end only in the total entrance into life through the resurrection.

What is the life that we who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ possess? It is the life of God himself. Peter tells us that we may "participate in the divine nature"

(2 Peter 1:4). Therefore, that life is as eternal and indestructible as God himself. It will go on forever; and it will not be an eternally wretched and debased existence, as our lives would be if we were left to

ourselves, but rather the continually entering into that life that possesses all the qualities of God.

Some have imagined that this life is not everlasting. Some have imagined that it is not eternal. But if that can be so, then words have no meaning and the Word of God is meaningless. If eternal life can be lost, it is not eternal. If it can be taken from us, it is not eternal. If we can renounce it so that it no longer belongs to us, it is not eternal. Is God changeable? Certainly not! Then his gifts cannot be withdrawn. The Bible says, "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). If God had given us ten years' life, then that life could not be lost before the end of the ten years. If he had given us one thousand years' life, then that life could not be lost before the end of the one thousand years. In the same way, if he has given us eternal life, then that life is eternal life. We can be certain that it will lead straight on to the moment of our own physical resurrection... and beyond.

Chapter 65.
A Matter of Life or Death

John 5:28-30

Do you know the difference between "temporary" and "permanent"? Temporary refers to something that can be changed; permanent refers to something that cannot be changed. This is important for understanding our present subject. For the subject is God's judgment, and the central point is that God's judgment will establish a permanent distinction between men, some entering into the fullness of life and some into what the Bible calls death or damnation.

The day of God's judgment is spoken of in many places in the Bible. For instance, to the Romans Paul wrote of "the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares" (Rom. 2:16). He preached to the Greeks in Athens, saying that the times of their ignorance God had formerly overlooked "but now he commands

all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice" (Acts 17:30-31). The Book of Revelation describes this judgment in the twentieth chapter. Jesus also spoke of this judgment, saying, "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice [he meant his own] and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me" (John 5:2830).

These verses present three doctrines. First, death is not the end of existence. Second, there are two forms of existence beyond the grave, one good and one terrible. Third, the particular kind of existence to be entered into depends upon the individual's relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. The obvious conclusion is that each person ought to examine himself in regard to this relationship.

More Beyond

The first point of Christ's teaching is that physical death is not the end of existence. It was not the end, either for himself or for others. Quite clearly he expected to die. He once said that he was going to give his life as a ransom for many. He told his disciples that he was going up to Jerusalem where he would be arrested, beaten, and then killed because of the hatred of the religious leaders toward him. All this happened. Yet Jesus also spoke of the fact that he would rise again after three days and return to the disciples.

We see from this text that Jesus expected others, both good and evil persons, to live on. Life is not the proper word to describe it, of course. Existence is a better term. Nevertheless, whatever term we use, it is obvious that according to Jesus the grave is not the end for anyone.

In this he was at one with Old Testament teaching. It often is said that ideas of the afterlife are not fully developed in the Old Testament, and this is true to a degree. Still, the great assumption of the Old Testament is that life does continue beyond the grave. For instance, it lies behind

the descriptions of the death of the patriarchs that tell us that they were gathered in death to those who had gone before. Abraham is said to have "breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people" (Gen. 25:8). We are told that Isaac "died and was gathered to his people" (Gen. 35:29). Jacob nourished the same expectation when he was told of the apparent death of his favorite son, Joseph. We read that "he refused to be comforted. 'No,' he said, 'in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son'" (Gen. 37:35).

The King James Version uses the word "sheol" in this last verse as another indication of the Old Testament faith in a life to come. "Sheol" has been translated as "hell" or "death" as well as the "grave" in other versions of the Old Testament. But we should never exclude the fact that in the Old Testament Sheol is a place name. It is the name of the place to which the dead go, much as "hades" or "limbo" designated the abode of the dead for the Greeks. On the one hand, those who die in faith go there. This is proved by Jacob's statement. On the other hand, it also is the destination of adulterers, sinners, and the heathen (Num. 16:33; Prov. 7:27; Isa. 14:9-15).

The existence of Sheol is a great testimony to the fact of life after death, and Jesus in his turn endorsed it. One commentator has written, "While opinions may well differ on the interpretation of what the Old Testament tells about the *nature* of life in Sheol, there can be no disputing its insistence on the *fact* of life in Sheol. Life here on earth is not the complete span for man; beyond it there is another and different existence which he cannot avoid, for 'what man is he that shall live and not see death, that shall deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?'"

It is possible that in the years before Christ's coming, devout men and women might have disputed whether these things were actually so. But whatever the case then, there can be no doubt of the truth that there is life beyond the grave now. Why can there be no doubt? There can be no doubt because of Christ's resurrection. Before 1492 Spanish coins often showed the Straits of Gibraltar with the Latin inscription *neplus ultra*. It meant "no more beyond." So far as men knew, the western end of the

Mediterranean Sea, marked by the Straits of Gibraltar, was the end of land. In that year, however, Columbus discovered the coast of America across the great sea. When he returned from his voyages the coins that had been in circulation were reissued, but now they bore the inscription *plus ultra*, "more beyond." This became the motto of the Spanish crown. In the same way, the Lord Jesus Christ once passed through the straits of death and returned, bringing abundant evidence that the Old Testament hope was well grounded.

Two Destinies

Likewise, we must note that Jesus did not merely reinforce what the Old Testament characters believed. He went on to show that beyond the grave there was to be a resurrection, that there would be a resurrection unto life for believers and a resurrection unto condemnation for unbelievers, and finally that these resurrections would forever establish the different destinies for these two groups.

It is true, of course, that in a few instances there may have been partial anticipation of this hope in the Old Testament also. Job was testifying of this faith when he said, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God" (Job 19:25-26). David was certainly expressing this hope when he declared, "But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself (Ps. 49:15). Still it is true that the full doctrine regarding a resurrection of the just to life and a resurrection of the wicked to punishment came in its fullness only through Christ's teaching. In fact, our text (from the early public ministry of Jesus) may be the earliest complete statement of this truth in history.

It is a glorious statement, at least for believers. Why? Because it refers to the consummation of our great salvation.

Perhaps I can best explain what this means by pointing out that when God determines to save a man he determines to save all of him. When man was created he was created a trinity, possessing a body, soul, and

spirit. Man sinned; when he sinned each part of his being came under the curse of sin and God's wrath. God had said to Adam in regard to the tree of knowledge, "When you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:17). When man sinned he died. His spirit died immediately— which he demonstrated by hiding from God. His soul began to die. His body died eventually and returned to the ground. Now, what happens when God saves a man? When God saves a man he replaces each part of man's being with a new part and, what is more, he does so in the order in which they were lost. First, he gives the person a new spirit. This is the life of God within him. During this life God begins to form a new soul as the individual is transformed after the image of Christ. This soul is called the "new man," which is placed in the individual by God and which exists there alongside the old man that is destined to perish. Finally, God creates a new body that will be united to the soul and spirit at the resurrection.

It is this uniting of our new souls and spirits with our new body for which we long. Now we have our old bodies. In death they will be gone, and our souls and spirits (which are the Lord's) will go to be with Jesus. When he returns we will receive our new bodies, and our salvation will be complete. Those who believe in Jesus wait expectantly for that day.

Damnation

On the other hand, in all honesty we must point out that, according to these same words, Jesus spoke of a resurrection not only unto life, as I have just described it, but also unto condemnation. At this point the King James Version reads "damnation," but the word is the same one that occurs in John 3:18: "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already" (KJV). It means that he is condemned to an eternity without God. God is the source of all good. Consequently, this existence is bad and is therefore properly described as being filled with terrors, woes, misery, wailing, and deep cries.

Let this thought grip your mind. God has appointed a day in which all men and women who have ever lived will be brought before him and

judged. Death is not the end. Therefore you and I— whoever we may be—must stand before him. Will your judgment be "unto life" because of your relationship to Jesus Christ? Or will your judgment be "unto condemnation"? Will the judgment unite you to God or be the means of your separation from him forever?

Mercy or God's Justice?

If you are asking yourself this question and are concerned about the answer, I now have the privilege of showing you that you can know the answer and can know it beyond any questioning. It all depends upon your relationship to Jesus Christ. If you come to the point of standing before God just as you are—without ever having benefited from Christ's death on your behalf or from his offer of righteousness and new life—then God will have no alternative but to banish you from his sight. You are sinful, no matter how good you may seem in your own eyes, and God cannot condone sin. What is more, you will find yourself the object of his fierce wrath. You are his creature. He has made you. Yet, you have rejected his way and spurned his Son, who came to earth and suffered to save people from their sin.

On the other hand, if you will come as one who has believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and in what he has done for you, then God promises to receive you as he receives Jesus. In fact, since Jesus is himself the Judge, it is Jesus who will receive you; and he will take you into heaven as one whose sin has already been punished and who now stands, not in his own soiled character but in that new life of the body, soul, and spirit that is given by God. How then can he fail to receive you? How can he reject you when you come not as the old creation, ruined by sin, but as his new creation made perfect in the life of the Savior?

It has always been my experience that those who have not yet believed in Christ react in one of two ways at the thought of God's judgment. Some simply refuse to believe it. They think quite wrongly, I believe, that judgment is inconsistent with God's character. "God is love," they argue; "how can a loving God condemn anyone?" The answer to this view is that God's love is not inconsistent with his judgment and that,

whatever we may think about the matter, the Bible quite obviously speaks of these two themes as compatible.

The other objection is more dangerous. These persons believe that it is somehow ignoble of themselves to receive salvation through Christ. To receive salvation in this way is to depend on God's mercy or grace, and they would far rather deal with God's justice. "I don't want mercy from God," they will say. "All I want is a fair shake. I just want justice."

I pity the person who wants nothing from God but justice. The justice of God? The justice of God will send a person to hell; the justice of God will never save him. Justice condemns! It is only the grace of God in Jesus Christ that pardons and makes alive.

The result of seeking nothing from God but justice is illustrated vividly by an incident from the life of the patriarch Abraham. Abraham had separated from his nephew Lot and had gone to live in the hill country of Palestine, while Lot had gone to live in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The sin of the cities called for judgment, and God came to Abraham to tell him that he was about to destroy them. Immediately Abraham began to think of his nephew. He, too, would be destroyed if God acted as he had said. So Abraham began to reason with God. "If you destroy Sodom and Gomorrah as they are," he argued, "You will end up destroying the righteous along with the wicked. Suppose there are fifty righteous persons in the city? Won't you preserve the city for the sake of the fifty righteous? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" "I will not destroy Sodom if fifty righteous persons can be found there," said God.

At this point Abraham began to worry that there might, in fact, not be fifty righteous people in Sodom. He could think only of four himself—Lot, Lot's wife, and Lot's two daughters. Besides, Lot might not have been very much of an evangelist. So Abraham continued, "Suppose five of those fifty persons are lacking. Will you destroy the city for the lack of the five?" "No," said God. "I will not destroy it if forty-five righteous persons are found there."

"Suppose there are only forty," said Abraham. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" God said that he would not destroy it for forty.

"Suppose there are thirty?"

"No, not for thirty."

"Twenty?"

"No, not for twenty." Finally Abraham reduced the number of righteous persons required for the salvation of the city to ten, and God promised not to destroy the city for ten. But even then Abraham had not reduced the number far enough. So, after God had removed the reluctant Lot, his wife, and his daughters from the city, judgment fell and the cities of the Dead Sea plain were eradicated.

That is what happens when the Judge of all the earth does right. Men are condemned by God's rightness. God's justice sends sinners to hell. Do you want justice? How foolish! On the other hand, how wonderful that the one who has been given new life in Christ need never confront that justice but instead will enter by the portal of physical death and resurrection into the fullness of life eternal! Do you trust the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation? You must decide. The decisions of this life affect the issues of eternity.

Chapter 66.
The Witnesses to Christ

John 5:31-47

The fifth chapter of John is concerned almost entirely with the question of how an individual can know God. In the language of theology this is the question of epistemology, and it has two parts.

The first part deals with means. By what means can we know God? What is the channel by which God reveals himself? The second part

deals with verification. Once we are aware of the channel by which we can know God, by what means can the channel itself be verified? In other words, how can we know that this means of knowing God can be trusted?

Fortunately, both parts of this question are discussed in John 5. We have looked at the first part already. The chapter has now brought us to the second part. In the first part of the speech recorded here, Jesus has declared himself to be equal with God and, consequently, the only one through whom God can be known. He has claimed to be the giver of life as well as the one who is entrusted with the final judgment. Put in the terms I have just used, this means that Jesus is himself the channel by which we can know God and that this is true because he is God. At this point one might naturally raise the second part of the question. "You say that Jesus is God. Well, then, upon what evidence is such a claim grounded?" In the context of Christ's speech itself one might ask, "Why should Christ's hearers, the Jews, believe such testimony? Why should they consider Jesus reliable?"

In answer to these questions and in deference to the procedure of Jewish law, which required two or three witnesses for the establishment of any fact, Jesus now cites three independent testimonies that reinforce and corroborate his own. They are the testimony of John the Baptist, the witness of Jesus' miracles, and the witness of the Old Testament Scriptures. These supportive witnesses are important for us simply because they are still valid. They require belief in Christ's claims.

The Father's Testimony

Before we begin to look at the witness of John the Baptist, the miracles, and the Scriptures in detail, we need to see something about their nature and therefore why Jesus appeals to them.

The central point is simply that when Jesus appeals to these supplementary witnesses to his claims, he does not appeal just to facts or circumstances, even less to what just might happen to be the opinion of some person concerning himself. He actually appeals to the witness

of the Father that is made on his behalf. In other words, just as Jesus is content to seek the will of God in all his acts and sayings (vv. 19-20), so is he content to let God bear witness to his claims. This is why the testimonies of John the Baptist, Jesus' miracles, and the Old Testament Scriptures are important.

We can see this principle clearly by imagining that a person has come to see us at our home with the news that our boss has given us a big promotion to that of a vice president in the firm. It is good news, of course, but it is meaningless unless the messenger has really come from the boss. If we call the firm and find that they have never heard of this person, then we can dismiss the visit as some strange practical joke. However, if the messenger really was sent by the boss, then we know that his offer is genuine. In the same way, the question of whether the supplementary witnesses to Jesus are really from God or not is important.

This is the point of the verses that begin this section of Christ's teaching. These verses say, "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid [that is, my witness does not meet the requirements of the law regarding the two or three witnesses]. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid" (vv. 31-32).

Who is the "other" witness? Some scholars have thought that this person is John the Baptist, primarily because a discussion of his witness follows immediately. This is possible, of course. Yet everything in the context points to a different conclusion. In the first place, the witness of this verse is described in the present tense—"There is another who *testifies* in my favor"—while the witness of John the Baptist is described as being past. Second, the full form of the expression —"testimony about me"—has the effect of setting the first testimony aside for special notice, while in this passage John's testimony is actually placed on a lesser footing. Third, the first two verses seem to be introductory. For these reasons, it seems wise to view the "other witness" as God the Father and to find the witness of the Father expressed in the testimony of John, in the miracles, and in Scripture.

The witness of the Father is referred to explicitly in the citation of each one (vv. 36-38).

The point of this is simply that the value of such testimony is to be traced precisely to the fact that it is the testimony of God. In other words, God the Father has not only sent God the Son, through whom he may be known. He has, in addition and at the same time, provided other supplemental witnesses so that people may both know that he has spoken in Christ and have no excuse for neglecting to put their trust in him.

John the Baptist

The first of the supplemental witnesses cited by Jesus in John 5 is John the Baptist. We have already looked at John in some detail in previous studies, particularly in relation to his character as a witness. John was a great witness. He is a pattern for our own witness. Yet he is brought forward here not simply because he is a witness (in the same way that Christians today might be witnesses) but because he is a particular type of witness, a prophet.

It might be assumed from John's rejection of any claim to be identified with the Messiah, with Elijah, or with "the prophet" mentioned in John 1:20-21 that John the Baptist was also rejecting the prophetic role itself. But this is unwarranted. It is true that John refused to claim that he was "*the* prophet" of Deuteronomy 18:15, but this is not the same thing as rejecting a prophetic function entirely. In these denials John was denying any importance of his own. However, it is precisely in pointing away from himself and to Christ that he emerges most strongly in the prophetic role.

We should note in the first place that as a priest and a Nazarite John was the perfect figure of the prophet. He was a priest by descent from Zacharias, his father; and he was a Nazarite by choice, as Samson, Samuel, and many others had been before him (cf. Luke 1:15). It is against the background of a common recognition of John as a prophet

that one can understand the questions of the delegation that came to him from Jerusalem.

The prophetic nature of John's mission is indicated also by the statement that John did not speak on his own accord but rather as one who had been sent by God. This statement is repeated twice in the fourth Gospel. It is found first in the prologue, where we are told, "There was a man who was sent from God; his name was John" (1:6). Later it is found on the lips of John himself in the statement, "I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him" (3:28). This latter statement has its origins in the Old Testament in the words of Malachi: "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me" (Mal. 3:1; cf. Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; and Luke 7:27).

A third indication of John's prophetic role is found in Jesus' reference to John as a "lamp that burned and gave light" (v. 35). This lamp is not a light that shines in its own right (like the sun) but a lamp that has been kindled from a source outside itself, a "kindled light." John is not the light. Only Jesus is the light. Nevertheless, John is important because he has been kindled by that light. Having been set on fire by God, he bears witness to Jesus.

What should we make of John the Baptist? He lived long ago. He was just one man. Still, Jesus says that John lived to verify his claim to be God, that this was his message. Was John right? Is Jesus God? In answering this question Jesus himself asks you to reckon with John's testimony.

Miracles

The second supplemental witness appealed to by Jesus is that of his signs or miracles. He calls them his "work." He says, "I have a testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing testifies that the Father has sent me" (v. 36).

What is this work? How are we to think of it as a witness to Jesus Christ? The best answer to these questions, which we will see in greater detail in the next study, is found in the term that John most characteristically uses in speaking of Christ's miracles. He calls them "signs." A sign is a symbol, a pointer to something signified. It is apparent that a miracle may be a sign by pointing to the presence of God or to a prophetic figure who has been authorized by God. The miracles do this in the case of Jesus.

The miracles reveal God. God is seen in the miracles. Thus, the miracles of healing show that Jesus is the Lord and giver of life. The multiplication of the loaves shows that he is the sustainer of life. The healing of the blind man shows that he grants physical and spiritual sight. The list can be extended. Jesus refers to the evidential value of the miracles when he cries, "Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father" (10:37-38).

The Scriptures

The third supplemental witness that Jesus appealed to in support of his claims is the witness of the Old Testament Scriptures. This is the most important of the three. For of the three witnesses (the witness of John the Baptist, the signs, and the Scriptures), it is the evidence of the Scriptures upon which Jesus most fully dwells and in connection with which he most clearly links the witness of the Father. This witness is not referred to in passing, as is the witness of the signs. Nor is it overshadowed by others, as is the case with the witness of John the Baptist. Instead, Jesus concentrates upon this testimony, so much that the verses that deal with it (vv. 37-47) emerge as one of the most significant summaries of the importance of Scripture in the Gospel.

Jesus declares, "The Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you

possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.... But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?" (vv. 37-40, 45-47).

In this teaching Jesus claims that the Old Testament Scriptures are from God and are fulfilled in him, that the unbelieving Jews have perverted the Old Testament and misunderstood it (just as many do today), and that the Old Testament itself will accuse those who refuse to believe in it.

God's Signpost

We are going to come back to this subject in a subsequent study, but before we do we need to see one important point of Christ's teaching that bears directly upon the subject we are considering. What is the *primary* purpose of Scripture? Is it to record the history of God's dealings with men? It does record such history, but that is not its primary function. Is it to reveal certain truths to men? Does the word "truth" seem to make this the right answer? Although it does reveal truths, this is not its primary function either. The primary purpose of Scripture is to point men and women to Christ. It is true that it uses a variety of means to do this. History is one of them; the communication of truth, particularly about God's nature and about man's sin, is another. But the primary purpose is to point men to Christ.

Have the Scriptures done that for you? Have you given them a chance? I can tell you on the authority of the Word of God that there will be no real knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ without them. And without him there will be no real knowledge of the Father.

The Scriptures, too, are a signpost. Suppose, as John Stott suggests in one of his books, that you and your family are determined to go on a picnic. You pick your spot and start driving toward it.

At last you come to a sign that contains the name of the picnic grounds. What do you do now? Do you immediately stop the car and get out and have your picnic around the signpost? Of course not! You follow the sign to the grounds themselves and have your picnic there. In the same way, God gave the Scriptures so that you and I, sinners that we are, might come to Christ in whom we have a true knowledge of the Father.

A Demanding Revelation

The divine testimony to the person of Jesus Christ is centered upon three great supplementary witnesses: the witness of John the Baptist, the witness of the signs, and the witness of the Scriptures. The Baptist's witness is that of a prophet and thus of the *prophetic word.* The witness of the signs is that of the *acted word.* The final and most important witness is that of the Scriptures, which are the *written word.* All three witnesses involve the direct and supernatural activity of God and hence may be described as aspects of the Father's own testimony to the person and teaching of the Son.

But where does that leave us? Can we look at these witnesses to Jesus Christ and then simply disregard them, as though they had nothing to say to us personally? Or will we listen to them and heed them as that evidence of God's testimony in history that has permanent validity? Clearly, if the witnesses are what Jesus declares them to be, then they must be heeded and we must commit our lives to Jesus. What will you say to God in that day when you stand before him? Will you say, "I did not know about Jesus"? What nonsense! Will you say, "I did know about him, but I was not convinced by the evidence"? How shallow! Have you ever examined it? Is it not better to say, "I have examined the witnesses and have believed all that they have told me about him; therefore, I come to you not on my own merits but on the merits of Christ, my Savior"?

Chapter 67.

Why Miracles?

John 5:36

In all my life I have never met anyone who has seen a ghost. But in the opening chapters of his book on *Miracles,* C. S. Lewis speaks of the one person whom he had met who had. "The interesting thing about the story," he writes, "is that that person disbelieved in the immortal soul before she saw the ghost and still disbelieves after seeing it. She says that what she saw must have been an illusion or a trick of the nerves." According to Lewis—and I believe him—the person may be right. For since a miracle must always be presented to our senses in order for us to become aware of it—either to our sight, sound, hearing, or feeling—and since our senses are not infallible, anything that appears to be miraculous may well be only an illusion. In life seeing is clearly not believing. It is rather the other way around.

Here, of course, we come to our first difficulty in our study of the fifth chapter of John. For here Jesus appeals to miracles in defense of his extraordinary claims. He says, "I have a testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me" (5:36). But is this appeal valid? We are right to ask: How do Christ's works bear witness to him? And besides, if the evidence of miracles *is* valid (as we have some reason to believe), what are we to say about Christ and his appeal to them?

The problem becomes even more acute and complex when we remember the story which Jesus told concerning the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man wanted God to send Lazarus back from the grave so that his brothers might repent. But Abraham, who spoke on this occasion, replied, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). Apparently Jesus taught that even so great a miracle as a resurrection would not persuade the unrighteous. Moreover, if we want proof that this is so, we need only to turn to the story of that other Lazarus who was raised by Jesus but who thereby provoked not faith

but hatred from the Jewish leaders. We are told that the leaders actually consulted how they might kill Lazarus because of the influence that his resurrection was having on the masses.

The question is clearly: What place does an appeal to miracles have in Christianity? Or, to put it another way, why and in what sense did Jesus himself appeal to them?

Christ's Signs

The best answer to these questions begins with the term "signs" or "signs and wonders." These words occur throughout the New Testament and mean "miracles." But the word "sign" does not always mean "miracle," and even in the cases where it refers to a miracle it always means more. Originally the word "sign" (*semeia* in Greek) meant "a distinguishing mark" or "token." Thus, in the Old Testament, circumcision is called a sign or token of the covenant that God made with Israel (Gen. 17:11). Paul repeats the same usage of the word in Romans 4:11. In the same way, the finding of the baby in the manger becomes a sign to the shepherds who were seeking the infant Jesus (Luke 2:12), and the "sign of Jonah" becomes a token of Christ's death and resurrection for the Jews (Luke 11:29-30). A sign is a symbol. It is a pointer to something signified. It is obvious that a miracle may become a sign by pointing to the unusual ability or character of the one performing it.

But what do the miracles point to in John? The answer is that they point to Christ's glory, which is only another way of saying that they reveal his divine worth or character. This is clear in the case of the changing of water into wine at Cana of Galilee, for John concludes that account by telling us that this was the beginning of miracles (the word is actually "signs") in which Jesus "revealed his glory" and on the basis of which "his disciples believed on him" (2:11). In every instance the sign draws attention to Jesus himself and in particular to his divine nature revealed in his works. Jesus taught this by saying, "The... work which I am doing testifies that the Father has sent me."

Incidentally—and we need to see this aspect of Christ's teaching too—the works that Christians do also bear witness to Jesus. Pink, one of the great commentators on John, has written, "If our works are 'dead works,' wood, hay, and stubble which shall be burned up in the coming day, that proves we are carnal, walking after the flesh; and such a witness will dishonor and grieve Him whose name we bear. But if we abound in 'good works,' this will show that we are walking after the spirit, and men (our fellow-believers) seeing our good works will glorify our Father which is in heaven."

The signs are also more than mere symbols. In some cases—above all in the miracles recorded by John—they actually contain Christ, are a part of him, just as his words are a part of himself. This means that they are actually part of the revelation.

Moreover, Christ's words and works belong together. This is made clear in two important texts. First, in John 15:22-24 Jesus speaks of his words and works together, showing that they are one in regard to their source and their effects. We can see the point best if the verses are printed as follows:

> If I had not come and *spoken* to them, they would not be guilty of sin.
>
> > Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well.
>
> If I had not *done* among them what no one else did, They would not be guilty of sin.

But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father.

The second text is John 14:10, in which "words" and "works" appear as interchangeable concepts: "The *words* I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his *work."*

The Major Signs

Christ's works are signs, not just his miracles, and so are his words. Everything he does is done to reveal God. In the nature of the case, however, some of the things that Jesus says and some of the things he does are more significant than others, with the result that John is compelled to choose from the many works at his disposal those that are most helpful for the church and that are most central to a true understanding of Christ's person. This, incidentally, is the true meaning of the concluding verses of chapter 20, which say, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (vv. 30-31).

What are the signs that John chooses? Among the many that reveal Christ's nature and character, John pays particular attention to the following:

1. *The transformation of the water into wine* (2:1-11). John tells us that this was the first of Christ's signs, and he uses it naturally to pass from the witness of John the Baptist, which occupies most of the first chapter of the Gospel, to the section of the Gospel that deals with the signs (chs. 2-11). The motive for this miracle cannot really be found in Christ's compassion for human suffering or in the conquest of evil, as is most often the case with the miracles recorded for us by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The motive is solely that the "glory" of Christ might be revealed and that the disciples might believe as a result of that revelation.

What did this sign reveal? For one thing, it revealed Christ's unity with God the Father in creative power. This is an illustration of John 1:3 that says that "through him all things were made." For another, it shows Jesus to be the bringer of Christian joy. John's point is that Jesus alone makes life joyous and abundant.

2. *The healing of the nobleman's son* (4:46-54). We have already studied this sign, which John calls the second of Christ's miracles.

It is a sign of healing, and thus shows the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to overcome sin and heal illness.

Even more significant than this is the fact that it also shows Jesus' ability to calm a troubled spirit and instill faith. We remember that the nobleman who came to Jesus did not have a strong faith originally. He was fearful, anxious, afraid that his son would die. Jesus led him to stronger faith, so much so that when the man left Jesus he actually went on calmly about his business and did not check on his son's condition until the next day.

3. *The healing of the disabled man* (5:1-18). John calls this the third sign, and it follows in his narrative closely upon the healing of the nobleman's son. What is the point of this miracle? Certainly it was not to provoke faith on the part of those who witnessed it. John tells us that it actually made the Jews angry, for they tried to persecute Jesus and kill him. It did not even provoke faith on the part of the man who was healed. For nothing is said about his faith at all, and his greatest loyalty seems to have been to the Jewish leaders rather than Christ even after his healing. Then what was the purpose? The point of the miracle is that *we* are like the disabled man spiritually. We have sinned, and spiritual inability to seek Christ has come from our sin. We cannot rise to meet him. We cannot even believe on him. Nevertheless, it is when we are disabled spiritually—blind, lame, and paralyzed—that Jesus comes to us to save us and to free us from sin's bondage. The miracle reveals God to be a God of great grace.

4. *The feeding of the five thousand* (6:1-14). This miracle is the first of three miracles whose significance is explained by Christ himself, in two cases by means of a long interlocking discourse. In this story, Jesus feeds five thousand people by means of a few small loaves and fish. The point is not just that Jesus is able to multiple bread. The point is that he can satisfy the hunger of the soul. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will

never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (6:35).

Have you found that Jesus is able to satisfy your hunger, that He is able to quench your thirst? He can. I do not care what your need may be. You may have a thirst for companionship. Do you feel that no one understands you, that no one cares? Jesus cares. You may feel unloved. Do you have a hunger for love? Do you feel that no one loves you, that no one ever will, perhaps even that you are unlovely? Jesus loves you. He proved that by dying in your place. Do you have a thirst for direction and meaning in your life? Jesus has a plan for your life, designed before the foundation of this universe. The person who has found Jesus to be the perfect provider for these needs has already been convinced by the miracle.

5. *The walking upon the water* (6:16-21). John does not call attention to this miracle, and it is possible that it is included mostly because it was attached historically to the previous miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. It is in each of the other Gospels. The point of the miracle, if John intends it to make a point, is that Jesus obviously possesses power over the laws of nature.

6. *The healing of the man born blind* (9:1-41). This healing is actually a double miracle, involving the restoration of both physical and spiritual sight to one who had been born both physically and spiritually blind. The two parts of the miracle presuppose and reinforce each other. What is the point? Jesus tell us when he describes himself as the "light of the world." In the same story the faith of the man who had been born blind but who had come to both physical and spiritual sight is contrasted with the unbelief of the authorities who, although confronted with the true spiritual light, prefer to live in darkness.

7. *The raising of Lazarus from the dead* (11:1-46). In the last of the public signs Christ's progressive display of power over nature, sin, and sickness comes to a climax in the total victory of life over death. In this case the discourse is mingled with the narrative, but

the key statement is outstanding: "I am the resurrection and the life" (v. 25). The miracle shows that Jesus is the source of eternal life, that it may be enjoyed here and now, and that the same power that assures it now will also, after the death of the body, raise the dead to a new and better existence beyond. It is significant that the Gospel specifically points to the raising of Lazarus as a sign (12:18), for this supreme manifestation of the glory of Jesus leads, not only to belief on the part of many from among the people but also to the most extreme and virulent hatred on the part of the authorities.

Taste and See

We come, then, to a summation of our answer to the question, What is the purpose of the miracles? The answer, on the negative side, is simply that the supernatural in itself does not prove the divine origin of the one performing it. Presumably even the devils can do miraculous things. The value of the miracles consists in their nature; that is, in what they reveal about God the Father and the Lord Jesus. This is the answer on its positive side. The miracles of Christ, as indeed all his works, both miraculous and nonmiraculous alike, show us his nature. They disclose his ability to fill the vacuum of the heart.

Let me state it in slightly different language. In John the signs are not occasioned *by* faith. They are occasions for faith. They are given to provoke faith and strengthen it.

Have they done that for you? If the miracles are true, then there has never been and doubtless will never be a person like this amazing Nazarene. Is this not provoking? Does it not demand that you investigate him personally to see whether the things written about him and claimed by him are valid? If you will not do this, then you demonstrate by your actions that the difficulties you have with belief are not rational. It is not as though God has not provided enough evidence for a thinking person to evaluate Christ's claims. Your difficulties are moral. The problem is sin. On the other hand, if you will investigate Christ's worth and character, you will find him to be what

countless others have also found him to be—the Son of God and your Savior.

Chapter 68.
The Witness of the Scriptures

John 5:37-38

The fifth chapter of John's Gospel contains the evidences that the Lord Jesus Christ gives for his claims—the witness of John the Baptist, the witness of Christ's miracles, and the witness of the Scriptures. The first two have already been discussed. The third is discussed in the verses beginning with verse 37 and continuing to the end of the chapter.

To understand the importance of these verses, one needs to recognize that they come at the end of Christ's discourse and therefore are in a position of prominence. To give an illustration, they stand at the end of this discourse much the way a star witness might be introduced at the end of a trial to nail down the case for the prosecution. Suppose a man is on trial for murder and the evidence for his conviction is being presented by the district attorney. The first witness comes forward and demonstrates that the accused had an opportunity to commit the crime. He was present in the area of the crime at the time it was committed. The second witness shows that he had a motive for committing the crime. He would have profited by the victim's death.

The third witness proves that the accused had access to the murder weapon. Finally, the fourth witness was an eye witness of the murder itself and can identify the murderer.

This is an illustration, in part, of the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ built up the witnesses for his claims as they are recorded in this chapter. The witness of John was a real witness. It was the witness of a prophet. God spoke through John, and the leaders of Christ's day even acknowledged the importance of John's witness by appointing a

delegation to visit John and question him. Still, in one sense, John's was but the witness of a man and only one man at that. It could be discounted. The witness of Christ's miracles follows. This is more important, for the miracles were evidence of God the Father working in Christ. The miracles revealed Christ's nature. Taken with the witness of the Baptist, they are quite important. Yet both fade into relative unimportance in light of the final witness, which is the witness of the Word of God.

So Jesus Christ begins to speak about the witness of the Bible to himself, stressing two points. The first is the divine origin of the Scriptures. The second is their primary purpose, which is to point to him. He is speaking of the first of these when he says, "And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent" (vv. 37-38).

Age of Decline

It is unfortunate that we need to stress the divine origin of the Scriptures as much as we do in our day. But it is necessary due to the fact that this truth is so widely contested, not only by scholars (from whom, of course, most of the doubts originate) but also by many regular church members. Doubt as to the divine origin of the Scriptures is so widespread in some quarters that many have even come to think that the situation is normal.

Actually nothing could be farther from the truth. The low view of the Bible that prevails in our day is a fairly recent development in light of the broad flow of church history. It goes back no more than two hundred years. A student of church history knows that up to the time of the Reformation (in some ways even for two hundred years beyond that) almost no one within the church doubted that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are uniquely the Word of God. Even heretics accepted this principle. Thus, all who claimed to be Christians

recognized that the Bible is a divine authority binding upon all men and that it contains objective truths that transcend human understanding.

Unfortunately, in the post-Reformation period the orthodox view of Scripture came under increasingly devastating attacks. Already weakened by centuries of appealing to the Fathers rather than to the Scripture in defense of a point of doctrine and in violent reaction to the Protestant Reformation, the Roman Catholic church in 1546 took the step of officially placing the tradition of the church alongside Scripture as an equally valid form and source of Christian doctrine. The full significance of this decision was no doubt overlooked at the time of the Council of Trent, but it was monumental. The act had tragic consequences for the Church of Rome as the continuing development of debilitating doctrines, such as Mariology and the veneration of the saints, indicates.

The Protestant church, as the result of its heritage and its sharp polemic against Catholicism, held on longer—for two hundred years. But then in the eighteenth century and particularly in the nineteenth century a critical appraisal of the Scriptures, backed by a naturalistic rationalism, succeeded in dislodging the Bible from the place it had previously held. For the church of the age of rationalism the Bible became man's word about God rather than God's word to man. And when people rejected the unique, divine character of the Bible, they rejected its authority also.

The Catholic church weakened the orthodox view of the Bible by exalting human traditions to the stature of Scripture. The Protestant Church weakened the orthodox view of Scripture by lowering the Bible to the level of traditions. The differences are great, but the results are similar. In both cases the unique character of the Scripture has been lost, its divine authority forfeited, and the function of the Bible as the reforming voice of God within the church forgotten for the majority of people.

Fortunately, neither position is tenable, and the confusion that haunts today's religious scene easily demonstrates this fact. The Protestant church is finding that without a valid basis for religious authority,

theology withers and the church becomes increasingly powerless to preach the gospel. Thus, in an amazing milestone address to delegates to the Consultation on Church Union, meeting in Denver in the fall of 1971, Peter L. Berger of Rutgers University called for a return to "authority in the Christian community" and bemoaned its loss. And in a most fascinating book published the following year, Dean M. Kelley, Director for Civil and Religious Liberty for the National Council of Churches, documented the inevitable decline of churches that lose a high degree of commitment and the corresponding growth of those who do not.

The Roman community, on its part, is discovering that although two sources of authority are better than none, Scripture and tradition often conflict and the deep human preference for traditions rather than Scripture inevitably shifts the balance of authority away from the written Word of God. Many Catholics, including Monsignor George G. Higgins, a top executive of the U.S. Catholic Conference and author, are beginning to deplore preaching that omits the gospel and bypasses biblical authority. Says another executive, "The church is trying to pick up the ways of the world instead of preaching Christ crucified." In such a time there is a challenge for those who still adhere to the view of Scripture that the Lord Jesus Christ taught and who boldly exalt the Word as the final revelation of the Father and the final arbiter of human thought and conduct.

God's Word

We recognize, of course, even as we refer to the divine origin of the Scriptures, that in one sense all the biblical books have been written by men. That is, men did the actual writing. At the same time we also affirm that there is a great difference between the Bible and any other book that has ever been written by any man or woman. Men wrote, but God stood behind the writing. Men used their own vocabulary and literary style, but God nevertheless guided them in the choice of the words and guaranteed the outcome.

This point—which would have been heartily endorsed by the Lord Jesus Christ himself—is stated in a memorable way by Peter. Peter wrote, "No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21 RSV). In this verse the Greek word translated "moved" is the word used by Luke in the second chapter of Acts to compare the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to "the blowing of a *violent* wind" (Acts 2:2). Again, in the twenty-seventh chapter it is used to describe the force of the wind upon the ship that was carrying Paul to Rome. Luke notes that the ship was carried along by the wind. He says, "The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were *driven* along" (v. 15). Again, "they... let the ship be *driven* along" (v. 17). Clearly, Luke wished to say that the ship was at the mercy of the storm. It did not cease to be a ship, but it did cease to have control over its course and destination.

In the same way, we are told through Peter that the writers of the Bible were borne along in their writing to produce the words that God intended to be recorded. They wrote as men, but as men moved by the Holy Spirit. The result was the revelation of God.

Someone might object at this point that if men had anything at all to do with the writing of the Bible, the results must at some point or other be filled with error. But this does not follow. An analogy can help. The analogy is one between the conception and birth of the Lord Jesus and the coming of our Bible. What happened when the Lord Jesus Christ was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary? We read that the Holy Spirit overshadowed her so that the child that was born of her was called "the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). In this conception there was a touching of the divine and the human, and the result was also in its turn both human and divine. Christ was a real man. He was a particular man, a Jew, who had a certain measurable weight and a recognizable appearance. You could have taken a picture of him. Yet he was also God almighty and without sin.

In the same way, just as the Holy Spirit came upon the virgin Mary so that she conceived the human Son of God in her womb, so also did the

Holy Spirit come upon the brain cells of Moses, David, the prophets, the evangelists, Paul, and the other biblical writers, so that they brought forth from their minds those books that constitute our Bible. All their writings bear the marks of human personality. They differ in style. At the same time, the ultimate source is divine, and the touch of the human did not stamp them with weakness or error any more than the womb of Mary imparted sin to the Savior.

Archaeological Evidence

We are going to go on from this point to see how this remarkable book with its divine authorship bears witness to Jesus Christ, how it can be misused, and why it will eventually condemn those who reject it. But before we do we need to answer the objections of someone who may have heard stories of how scholarship has supposedly disproved the reliability of the Bible and who are therefore inclined on those grounds to reject all that has been said about the divine origin of the Scriptures. Has scholarship demonstrated that the books of the Bible are fallible and therefore merely written by men after all? Is the Bible disproved?

There was a time not long ago when claims such as these were made by many influential spokesmen, and were made openly. In past years almost every biblical theologian and scholar spoke of so-called "certain results" or "assured findings" that were imagined to have laid the orthodox conception of the Bible to rest forever. Today, however, as anyone who had the opportunity to delve deeply into such questions knows, these phrases no longer occur with such frequency. In fact, they hardly occur at all. Why? Simply because, as the result of the continuing march of biblical and archaeological investigations, many of these so-called "assured results" have simply blown up in the faces of those who propounded them.

Here is an example. In 2 Kings 15:29 there is a reference to a king of Assyria named Tiglathpileser. He is spoken of as having conquered the Israelites of the northern kingdom and as having taken many of them into captivity. A generation ago scholars were saying—their books are still in our libraries—that this king never existed and that the account of

the fall of Israel to Assyria is something akin to mythology. Now however, archaeologists have excavated Tiglath-pileser's capital city and can give his whole history. They have even found his name pressed into bricks that read: "I Tiglath-pileser, king of the west lands, king of the earth, whose kingdom extends to the great sea...." The English reader can find accounts of his battles with Israel in James B. Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.*

About the same time that some scholars were denying the existence of Tiglath-pileser, others were denying that Moses could have written the first five books of the Bible on the ground, which seemed irrefutable enough, that writing had not been invented in his day. Since that time, however, archaeologists have unearthed tablets and inscriptions that were written several hundreds of years before Moses and, ironically enough, in the very Sinai peninsula where Moses led the people of Israel for forty years.

In even more recent days, many scholars have denied that the historical books of the New Testament were written close enough to the events they purport to relate to be reliable. The synoptic Gospels in particular were dated late; and John, which seemed to have the greatest degree of Greek flavoring, was pushed back well into the second Christian century—and by some scholars into the third. In time, however, a piece of papyrus was uncovered in Egypt, on the basis of which it was necessary to date John no later than A.D. 125 and presumably much before that time. In other words, the results of scholarship in our day increasingly validate the biblical claims.

They do not prove infallibility—nothing can do that—but they do lead in the direction of reliability and reveal nothing that is not compatible with the highest view of the Scriptures.

Waiting on the Rock

The Christian need never fear to stand upon the Word of God, recognizing its full authority, as the Lord Jesus Christ did. At times there will be critical theories that run against it. The arguments may

seem unanswerable, so much so that the one who tries to stand against them may well be dismissed as an obscurantist. The wise of this world will say, "You can believe that if you want to, but the results of scientific criticism teach us better." These things have happened before and will happen again. But the Christian who will stand upon Scripture will find even within his lifetime that, as the so-called "assured results" begin to crumble about the scholars, the view of the Bible held by the Lord Jesus Christ, the historical view of the church, will prevail.

Many years ago a former leader of the Church of England, Bishop Ryle of Liverpool, wrote wisely, "Give me the plenary, verbal theory of biblical inspiration with all its difficulties, rather than the doubt. I accept the difficulties and humbly wait for their solution. But while I wait, I am standing on the rock."

Chapter 69.
The Purpose of the Scriptures

John 5:39

It is not unusual in our day for men and women to have a low view of the Bible. Many persons, including professors of theology and ministers, feel that the Bible is man's word about God rather than God's word about man and so devalue it. Therefore, it is necessary to speak as Christ did, stressing the divine origin of the Bible and pointing out its supernatural characteristics. At the same time, possessing a low view of Scripture is not the only error embraced by people today. Many misunderstand it. They do not know what it says or why it is written. As a result of this it is necessary also to speak of its purpose, which is, above all else, to reveal Christ Jesus.

What is the purpose of Scripture? According to Jesus Christ the purpose of the Scripture is to point to him and reveal him. Thus, in the verses we are studying, he said, "You search the scriptures, because you think that

in them you have eternal life; and *it is they that bear witness to me*" (5:39 RSV).

Have you seen this truth? Martin Luther is one who saw it clearly. In a sermon on this text preached only months before his death he argued, "Here Christ would indicate the principal reason why the Scripture was given by God. Men are to study and search in it and to learn that He, *He*, Mary's Son, is the one who is able to give eternal life to all who come to Him and believe on Him. Therefore he who would correctly and profitably read Scripture should see to it that he finds Christ in it; then he finds life eternal without fail. On the other hand, if I do not so study and understand Moses and the prophets as to find that Christ came from Heaven for the sake of my salvation, became man, suffered, died, was buried, rose, and ascended to Heaven so that through Him I enjoy reconciliation with God, forgiveness of all my sins, grace, righteousness, and life eternal, then my reading in Scripture is of no help whatsoever to my salvation. I may, of course, become a learned man by reading and studying Scripture and may preach what I have acquired; yet all this would do me no good whatsoever. For if I do not know and do not find the Christ, neither do I find salvation and life eternal. In fact, I actually find bitter death; for our good God has decreed that no other name is given among men whereby they may be saved except the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12)."

One Author

If you will think about this purpose of Scripture for a moment, I am sure you will see that it is an additional reason why the Bible must be divine in origin. The Bible was written over a period of several thousand years by more than thirty human authors. If the product of these men was no more than a human product, it is inconceivable that they could have agreed even on an outlook on life, let alone on the grand overriding purposes of God in history as disclosed in their book. Yet this agreement is precisely what we find. The only explanation is that, although the human writers did write out of their own perspective and out of their own historical environments, nevertheless, the God who

stands behind the Bible so inspired their writings that the resulting words were inerrant and consistent. What is more, the combined result was in an important sense *one book.*

It is no accident in this connection that in the verses we are studying, although Jesus does speak of Moses as having been responsible for part of the Bible (vv. 45-47), he nevertheless begins with the statement that the Scriptures in their entirety are God's witness to his messianic claims. This is the course of the argument in the fifth chapter. God bears witness to Jesus (vv. 30-32). He does so through the witness of John the Baptist (vv. 33-35). He does so through Christ's miracles (v. 36). Above all, however, he does so through the Bible (vv. 37-47).

We may sum up Christ's teaching in this chapter by saying that according to Jesus: 1) the Bible is given by God, 2) the purpose of the Bible is to point to himself, and 3) to use the Bible in any other way is ultimately to misunderstand it and pervert its intention.

One Subject

At this point someone might find himself thinking along these lines: "Granted that the purpose of the Bible (a Bible, I will admit, that is given by God) is to point to Jesus Christ. But how does it point to him? Is not the Bible mostly history? In the Old Testament, at least, does it not talk about anything but Jesus? How then can we say that it points to him? How can he be its subject?" The answer to that question is that Jesus becomes the subject of the Old Testament in two ways: (1) by fitting in with its general themes and (2) by fulfilling the specific prophecies to be found there. He becomes the subject of the New Testament in a far more obvious way, for the New Testament tells his story and is almost exclusively about him.

Think, for instance, about the great themes of the Old Testament. One theme is the sin of man and man's need. The Bible begins with the story of the creation. But no sooner is this story told (in the first two chapters of Genesis) than we also are told of man's fall. Instead of being humbly and gratefully dependent upon his Creator, as he should have been, man

was soon in a state of rebellion against God. He went his way instead of God's. So the consequences of sin, including death, passed upon the race.

In the rest of the Old Testament we see these consequences unfolding. Thus we have the murder of Abel, the corruption leading up to the flood, demonism, sexual perversions, eventually even great tragedy for the chosen nation of Israel in spite of great blessings. Israel is carried off in slavery. Although some eventually return to the land of blessing, they return to a much less glorious existence. The Old Testament story is best summarized in David's great psalm of repentance, which ought properly to be the psalm of the whole human race: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.... Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:1-3, 5).

Here is one great biblical doctrine. But if we understand it rightly, even this doctrine is not an end in itself. It is true. The heart of man acknowledges it to be true. But the truth of our sin and need is expounded in the Bible not merely for the sake of expounding a truth but rather because at the same time it is able to point to Christ as the solution to the dilemma.

We get some idea of this aspect of the Bible's witness by thinking of it as a doctor's diagnosis. Here is a man who goes to the doctor complaining of nausea and abdominal pain. The doctor notes an area of tenderness in the groin, does a blood test, and diagnoses appendicitis. What is the purpose of the doctor's diagnosis? Is telling the truth the purpose? Well, yes, in a sense. That is one purpose, but it is not the ultimate purpose. The ultimate purpose is to get the man with the pain to the surgeon so that the threat of death may be averted. In the same way, the Bible diagnoses the spiritual condition of the race so that individual men, women, and children might turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, since he is the only one who can cure their condition and bring

healing. This is one way in which Jesus becomes the theme of the Old Testament.

We might add that all who really believed during the Old Testament age saw this. Thus we have stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, the prophets, Anna, Simeon, John the Baptist, and others, all of whom placed their trust in the coming Redeemer and waited for him.

This leads us to the second great Old Testament theme: the existence of a God who acts in love to redeem sinners. This God the Father did himself in partial ways throughout the Old Testament period. At the same time, even as he did it he pointed to the coming of his Son who would redeem his people perfectly and forever.

Take the dealings of God with Adam and Eve on the occasion of their having sinned in the garden. Sin had separated the man and woman from the Creator. They tried to hide. God, however, came to them in the cool of the evening, calling. It is true that God spoke in judgment, as he had to do. He revealed the consequences of their sin. Still, at the same time that he spoke in judgment, he killed animals. He clothed the man and woman with skins, covering their shame. Thus he began his teaching of the way of salvation through sacrifice. In the same story he spoke to Satan, revealing the coming of One who would one day defeat him forever. "He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Gen 3:15).

Nine chapters later we find another, somewhat veiled, reference to the "seed" who shall crush Satan. This is God's first great promise to Abraham stressing that in him all men would be blessed (12:3). In chapter 22 it is restated like this, "And through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed" (22:18). The blessing referred to here certainly is not a blessing to come to all people through Abraham personally. It is not a blessing to come through all Jews indiscriminately, for all Jews are not even theists. It is not even a blessing to come through believing Jews. The blessing foretold is that which was to come through *the* seed of Abraham, the promised seed, the Messiah. Thus, years later the apostle Paul, who knew this text, used

it to show that (1) the seed was the Lord Jesus, (2) the promise to Abraham was one of blessing through him, and (3) the blessing was to come through Christ's great work of redemption (Gal. 3:13-16).

In the Book of Numbers there is an interesting prophecy spoken by the Lord through Balaam, that shifty, halfhearted prophet of Moses' day. Balak, a king who was hostile to Israel, had hired Balaam to curse the Jewish people. But every time Balaam opened his mouth to curse, blessings on the people came out instead. On one occasion he said, "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.... A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city" (Num. 24:17, 19). This was a prophecy of Christ's coming. In the same way the patriarch Jacob spoke of him while he was dying, saying, "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations if his" (Gen 49:10).

Moses also spoke of the One who would come. Speaking for God he declared, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him" (Deut. 18:15). Again, with God speaking, "I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him" (v. 18).

The Psalms contain great prophecies. The second psalm tells of Christ's eventual victory and rule over the nations of this earth. This psalm was a popular one with the early Christians who used it in reference to Christ, as is apparent from Acts 4. Psalm 16 foretells the resurrection (v. 10; cf. Acts 2:31). In the twenty-second, twenty-third, and twenty-fourth psalms are three portraits of the Lord Jesus: the suffering Savior, the compassionate shepherd, and the King. Other psalms speak of other aspects of his life and ministry. At last Psalm 110 returns to the theme of his rule, looking for the day when Jesus shall take his seat at the right hand of the Father when all his enemies shall be made his footstool (v. 1).

Dozens of prophecies concern details of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. They occur in the prophetic books—especially Isaiah,

Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and Zechariah—but also elsewhere. Jesus deliberately submitted his life to the outline for it as revealed in such prophecies, and he fulfilled them in careful and specific detail. That he did do this is evidenced by his rebuke to Peter after Peter had tried to prevent his arrest in Gethsemane. Jesus said, "Put your sword back in its place.... Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" (Matt. 26:52-54).

Open Book, Open Mind

After his resurrection the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to two of his disciples, a man and his wife, who were on their way home from Jerusalem following the Passover during which he had been killed. The disciples were Cleopas and Mary. They were dejected. Mary at least had seen the crucifixion, and when Jesus had died her faith in him and her hope had died also. Neither of them had any understanding that Christ needed to die and rise. Thus, even when reports of the empty tomb reached them early on that first Easter morning neither of them was able to take in the news.

As they went on their way Jesus appeared to them, but he had changed himself so that they could not recognize him. He could have revealed himself to them at once. Instead he revealed the purpose of the Scriptures and so taught both this couple and ourselves a great lesson.

The Bible says that he "opened" the Scriptures to them. The opening itself takes place in the midst of the story, but the phrase does not occur until the end. In reporting their encounter with Jesus they said, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32). As we read on in the story, however, we soon find that this initial "opening," the opening of the Scriptures, is followed by another "opening." This is the opening of their eyes. We read that as a consequence of his teaching and as he sat with them and broke bread in their home, "Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (v. 31). Finally, at the end of the story we

read that Jesus again appeared to them in the presence of the other disciples and "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures" (v. 45).

Here are three great openings—the opening of the Scriptures, the opening of the eyes, and the opening of the mind. All three need to be reproduced in the life of every growing Christian. To have the Scriptures opened in the right way is to open the eyes to Christ. This in turn opens eyes in a new way to the Scriptures.

Has much of the Word of God been a mystery to you? Have you failed to see its purpose? If this has been the case, try reading the Bible to find Christ. Find him as the seed of the woman and of Abraham. Discover him prefigured in the life of Joseph. Recognize him as the Passover Lamb. See him as the rock in the wilderness. Learn about him as the cloud who guides his people in the years of their wandering. Perceive him as the Righteous One of Deuteronomy. Carry through the pages of the Old Testament to Malachi where he is portrayed as the Sun of righteousness risen with healing in his wings. If this happens for you, the Bible will cease to be a book to be handled only and instead will become a tool to be looked through. It will become a telescope that will bring you close to Jesus.

Chapter 70.
The Misuse of the Scriptures

John 5:39-44

In the controversy the Lord Jesus Christ had with the Jewish leaders of his day concerning the Scriptures, there was at least one point of agreement and two points of disagreement. The point on which both Jesus and the Jewish rulers agreed was that the Scriptures had a divine origin. Many would disagree today, of course. But in Christ's day all recognized that the Scriptures of the Old Testament came from God. The points on which they disagreed were these: first, the purpose of the Scriptures and, second, the use of the Scriptures. All but the last of

these points have already been considered. So in this study, we want to look at the ways in which the Bible can be misused.

Jesus spoke of this error when he said, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I do not accept praise from men, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.... How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?" (John 5:3742, 44).

An End in Themselves

We must begin by asking the questions: How did the Jews misuse the Scriptures? Can we misuse them in the same way? The first answer, according to these words of Jesus, is obviously that the Jews misused Scripture by treating the words of Scripture as an end in themselves rather than allowing them to do their primary work, which is to point to Jesus. They searched the Scriptures, but they did not come to Christ. We err along the same lines whenever we allow Bible study to become academic and, as a result, do not allow ourselves to be drawn closer to God because of it.

No one could really fault the Jews of Christ's day for their meticulous study of the Scriptures. This was an acknowledged fact. The Jews did study the Scriptures. For this reason, I believe that verse 39 must be translated using the indicative mood ("You study the Scriptures") as many modern translations do, rather than using the imperative ("Study the Scriptures") as the Authorized Version does. The Jews prized the Scriptures. The difficulty did not lie there. The difficulty lay in the fact that in their high regard for the Bible they easily passed over its intention.

As a result, although they gained honor from men for their detailed knowledge of the Bible, they did not gain salvation.

We find an example of this just a few chapters farther on in John's Gospel. In chapter 9 John tells the story of the healing of a man who

had been born blind. He was physically blind, of course. But the meat of the story lies in the fact that, like all men, he also was spiritually blind before Christ touched him. Afterward he came to spiritual sight. The man born blind began with the confession that, so far as he knew, he was healed only by a "man" named Jesus. He ended with the confession that Jesus is the "Lord," and worshiped him.

When the man was healed, he came into conflict with the Jewish rulers. They knew of Jesus, but they did not believe in him. In fact, they did not believe in him precisely because of their attitude to the Scriptures. For them the revelation recorded in the Old Testament was an end in itself. Nothing could be added. Nothing more, in fact, could be desired. They said, "We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from" (9:29). The man who had been born blind did not try to compete with them in their acknowledged mastery of the Old Testament, but he pointed to the unquestioned fact of his healing. He concluded, "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (v. 33). In treating the Old Testament as an end in itself the Jews, therefore, actually perverted it and missed its true meaning. They failed to see that it is precisely of Jesus that the Old Testament testifies.

Let me bring this down to a very practical level—to our own day. Does anyone pervert the Bible by considering it an end in itself in our day? I believe that this happens frequently. Let me give some examples.

First, it happens in the world of biblical scholarship. Take the "historical Jesus" movement, which dates from 1768, the year in which the noted German scholar Hermann Samuel Reimarus died. Reimarus was not really a New Testament scholar, but at his death he left behind a manuscript that had far-reaching implications for those in the New Testament field. Reimarus argued that historians must distinguish between the "aim" of Jesus and the "aim" of his disciples. By this he meant that scholars should distinguish between the historical Jesus, who actually lived, and the Jesus of the New Testament, who was largely a product either of the faith or imagination of his followers. Faced with this choice, which he regarded as a choice between mutually exclusive alternatives, Reimarus chose the Jesus of history stripped of all

supernatural elements. In his reconstruction Jesus then became one who went about preaching the kingdom of God but who died forsaken by God and disillusioned. Reimarus thought that Christianity was the product of the disciples who stole the corpse, proclaimed a bodily resurrection, and gathered followers.

It was obvious to many that Reimarus's views were extreme and his work polemical.
Nevertheless, it turned out that his manuscript set the pattern for a whole century of historicalJesus research. Scholars began to react against the supernatural element in the Gospels and cast about for a natural, alternative Jesus. Unfortunately, each scholar only succeeded in producing a Jesus in his own image. Rationalists saw him as the great teacher of morality. Socialists viewed him as a friend of the poor and a revolutionary. The most popular "lives of Jesus" volumes, those of David Friedrich Strauss, rejected most of the gospel as mythology, and Bruno Bauer ended his quest by denying that there ever was a historical Jesus. Bauer explained all the stories about Jesus as the products of the imagination of the primitive Christian community.

One can hardly fail to be impressed even today at the immense energy and talent that German scholars poured into this so-called "quest" for the historical Jesus, but the results were meager and the conclusions wrong. Scholarship had made the Gospels an end in themselves, so that the Bible became a book to be weighed and manipulated rather than believed and obeyed. What was the result? The result was that the Jesus produced was neither the historical Jesus nor the Christ of Scripture. Christ was the casualty. Here, then, was the error of Judaism, repeated on western soil and in recent history.

Let me give another example. Is it not true that the same thing happens in another way when a person buys a beautiful Bible to place in an important position in his or her home but fails to read it? Why do people do this? The answer is that in their minds the Bible is something special. They have a superstitious reverence for it. But their belief does

not go beyond superstition. As a result, they never read it and, therefore, never come into contact with its author.

Third, the evangelical world may be in danger of doing almost the same thing with translations. I am for the use of any translations that actually help the user get into the Scriptures and obey them. I recommend the use of contemporary versions of the Bible along with more standard texts such as that of the Authorized, the Revised Standard, and the New American Standard versions. But alongside this legitimate use of translations there also is unfortunately an unhealthy preoccupation with the "best" and "latest" or most "contemporary" translation that I at least am convinced is harmful. Among those who get their minds fixed on the translations, it is the small variations between different texts that prove most interesting, rather than the teaching. Thus, obedience to Christ and a desire to know him better evaporates.

Personally I believe that there is absolutely no need for another English translation in our day. We have all varieties. Any taste can be satisfied. Perhaps much of our current interest in translations is traceable to the publishers who encourage our interest in them for commercial purposes. At any rate, I believe that the immense amounts of effort expended on producing such translations would be far better spent in getting the Bible into the languages of people who have not yet seen even one translation of the Scriptures.

Details Only

However, we must stop with these observations and go on. The first error that the Jews of Christ's day made, then, was the error of regarding Scripture as an end in itself. But this was not their only error. There was a second error also—that of becoming so preoccupied with the details of Scripture that they missed the truths contained there. For instance, the scribes, whose work it was to copy the Scriptures, subjected the pages of the Bible to the closest scrutiny. They gave attention to every syllable. They even counted up the words and letters so that they knew which of them came in the middle of the page and how many of each a given page should have. We can be thankful for this great care in one

sense, for the accuracy of our present Old Testament texts is the result of it. Nevertheless, in the case of most scribes the reaction of the copier with the Word of God stopped with the copying. The words were accurate, but what is the value of accurate words without meanings? Or what is the value of letters if these are not inscribed on the fleshly tables of the heart?

We have a contemporary example of this error in those who have a high degree of biblical knowledge—those who can name the twelve apostles, all the cities Paul visited, the list of the Hebrew kings, and so on—but who have missed what the Scriptures have to teach about sin, justification, the Christian life, and obedience. Many others make this mistake in a preoccupation with prophecy.

Finally, the Jews also erred in considering the Scriptures rather than God as the source of life. This is easy to document. One Jewish writing, the Siphre on Deuteronomy 32:2, says, "As rain is life for the world, so also are the words of Torah life for the world." First Baruch 4:1-2 says, "This is the book of the commandments of God and the Law that endureth forever. All they that hold it fast are appointed to life; but such as leave it shall die." Hillel's words to the same effect are proverbial: "More flesh more worms; more wealth more care; more maidservants more lewdness; more menservants more thieving; more women more witchcraft; more Torah more life.... Whoso has gained a good name has gained it for himself; whoso has gained for himself words of Torah has gained for himself the life of the world to come" (*Pirke Aboth* 2:8). Quite clearly, this was believed literally. The important thing was the memorization of Scripture; this in itself won salvation. Against this view Jesus wished to point out that formal study of the Bible was *not* a guarantee of life to come, as the rabbis believed. Christ is the life, not the Scriptures considered in themselves. Only Christ can guarantee salvation.

What is needed then? The answer is that men and women need the new birth found in a new relationship to Jesus. The important story here is the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus recorded earlier in the Gospel. Nicodemus was a Pharisee. He was a representative figure of

the Jews. In this context a Jewish reader would expect a rabbinical debate, a discussion of the specific promises concerning a messiah, or something similar. Instead, the situation is no sooner introduced than Jesus moves the discussion to a higher and more spiritual plane. Jesus answers Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (3:3).

We may summarize this by saying that the Bible was given by God to point a man to the Savior and that he must come to the Savior if he is to find life. This is necessary, for unless the life of God takes possession of our hearts even the Word of God will be incomprehensible.

Those Who Find Jesus

Has the Word of God done that for you? Has it pointed you to the Savior? Let me give you one last story. One time in preparing a Christmas message I became impressed with the large number of men who missed Christmas even though there was no real need for them to have missed it. The innkeeper was one. He was too busy. Herod was another. But by far the most interesting of all those who missed the birth of Jesus were the religious leaders, the chief priests and the scribes, who missed it even though they had the Old Testament and knew where Christ should be born. You remember the story. The wise men had come to Jerusalem. Herod inquired of the scribes. The scribes said that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem. It was on their word that the wise men started out to Bethlehem where they found him. These men had the Scriptures. They knew them well enough to have the right answers. But they did not leave their own homes or the palace to investigate the Savior's arrival.

On the other hand, the Christmas story also tells of some who did find Christmas. They were not the kings of this world. They were not the religious leaders. They were not the thousands who were entirely engrossed in the countless minutia of materialistic lives. They were just poor folk who were looking to God and to whom God came.

Who were they? Some were shepherds. They were not important in the social structure of the ancient east. Yet they saw the angels. The wise men also found Christmas. They were not even Jews. Yet they saw the star. Finally, there were the poor but saintly folk like Simeon and Anna. These could well have been discounted either because of their means or social position or age. Some would dismiss them. Yet they saw and even held God's treasure. Why did these people find Jesus when the important of the world, as the world judges importance, so clearly missed him? There are two answers. First, they were honest enough to admit their need of a Savior. Second, they were humble enough to receive him personally when he came.

The Bible calls for this honest confession of sin and this humble commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. You can read the Bible as the leaders of Israel did. You can misuse it out of pride. Or you can use it properly and come yourself to the Savior. Will you come in a spirit of humility?

Chapter 71.
The Accusation of the Scriptures

John 5:45-47

Do you remember the *Titanic,* that giant luxury liner built for passage of the North Atlantic sea lanes? The *Titanic* had been designed according to the latest of the scientific methods of its day and was supposed to be incapable of sinking. But she did sink. She hit an iceberg that ripped through nine of her watertight compartments. The resulting pressure was enough to burst through the rest of the ship. She went down, taking to the bottom many who were convinced that it could not happen. The *Titanic* disaster was a classic case of misplaced confidence.

We also discover a case of misplaced confidence in the three verses that close the important fifth chapter of John's Gospel. However, in this case the tragedy involves not merely the loss of life in this world. It also

involves loss of life in the world to come. The Jewish leaders with whom Christ was speaking were not at all worried about salvation. They had the law of Moses, and they trusted their knowledge of it. It was evident from all that Jesus had to say, however, that a mere knowledge of the law was inadequate. The law was useful, but in itself it could not save; it was powerless. In fact, said Jesus, the law will actually condemn those who are trusting it. "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?" (John 5:45-47).

God's Standards

At this point the account that John gives of the conversation between Jesus and the Jews breaks off. But I suppose that if it were continued, the Jews would have been reported as asking the question we all want to ask when told that God's law condemns us. We ask it in different forms. Some ask, "If the law condemns us, then why did God give it?" Others say, "Why bother to keep the law, if this is the outcome?" Some ask, "What is the purpose of the law?" At the heart of these questions is the basic human objection that instead of pointing us to Jesus as the Savior God should take account of our nature and good works.

This is what the Pharisees had under the religious system that they had constructed. Jesus had said that these religious leaders desired the honor that comes from men (v. 44), and this was quite accurate. It was characteristic of them that they sought praise. They dressed so that everyone would recognize them. They prayed in a loud voice, publicly, so that everyone would observe what they were doing. They made sure that everyone knew what they were giving to the temple. In short, under this system people had taken their minds off God and were comparing themselves with others. They did quite well by this comparison, at least in their own eyes. So when Jesus came they obviously saw no need for a Savior.

Here, however, they missed the major point of the law, for the law was not given to help them do better than others but to show them that no matter how well they did they could not do well enough to satisfy God.

William Barclay says quite accurately, "The point is not: 'Am I as good as my neighbor?' The point is: 'Am I as good as God?' The point is not: 'Is my scholarship and is my piety greater than that of other people whom I could name?' The point is: 'What do I look like to God?' So long as we judge ourselves by human comparisons there is plenty of room for self-satisfaction, and selfsatisfaction kills faith, for faith is born of the sense of need. But when we compare ourselves with Jesus Christ, and through Him, with God, we are humbled to the dust, and then faith is born, for there is nothing left to do but to trust to the mercy of God."

It is only when we compare ourselves with God that we realize the need for a work of redemption accomplished by a Savior who comes from God to lift us up to himself.

Perfection

All this falls into an even clearer light when we go on to ask what God's standard is and find out, on the basis of the law, that this is perfection. I sometimes say in teaching on this subject, "Suppose that God were to come to you right now as you are and immediately take you as you are into heaven." If this should happen, heaven would not be heaven anymore. Heaven would be a little bit dirty. And it would be very dirty if God were to do this with us all. No, God's standard must be perfection. Nothing else can satisfy him. This is the message of the law. Thus, the law itself says, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law" (Gal. 3:10; cf. Deut. 27:26).

This is the accusation of Moses, about which Christ was speaking. We hear it and tremble, for this is a terrible verdict. At the same time we need not tremble for long, for at the same time that God sets forth his standard he also sets forth the means by which that standard may be

met. Instead of striving on our part, God tells us to rest on what he has done for us and to present it back to himself as he desires.

But before we go on to see what this means more precisely, we must deal more with this idea of perfection. Perfection is the standard, but what is perfection? One answer to that question comes from the law of the Old Testament. The Ten Commandments are the heart of the Old Testament law, and Deuteronomy 6:5 is the summation of the Ten Commandments. So we may deal with just this verse. It says, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." This is the verse by which Jesus summed up the law in response to the question of the rich young ruler.

The point is that no one has ever done this. Moreover, it necessarily follows that if no one has been able to live up to it, and if this is the standard God gave, then there has never been anyone who has ever been saved by the law. One commentator has written, "I do not expect to meet anyone in Heaven who is there because of the Ten Commandments. Oh, I will meet men there who have measured themselves by the law and found that they had fallen short and therefore have learned they must run to the grace of God to be saved through the blood sacrifice He had provided, but no one will be there through the commandments themselves."

Not a few men and women try to take comfort in the fact that although they are condemned by a verse like Deuteronomy 6:5, nevertheless there are some commandments that they seem capable of fulfilling. But this is misplaced confidence also. James 2:10 tells us, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." This means that perfection is not to be measured by how well one can keep one particular commandment but by how well he keeps them all. By this measure a person is as imperfect by breaking one law as by breaking all ten. Suppose you had a boat that is fastened to a dock above a waterfall by a chain of ten links. How many do you have to break to set the boat adrift? The answer is: Just one. In the same

way, men are adrift and condemned by the law no matter which one or how many of the commandments have been broken.

Another important expression of God's standard of perfection is found in the Sermon on the Mount. The entire sermon is an expression of it, of course. But again, we may take that one verse that is a summary. This is the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule says, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12). Who does this? The only honest answer is: No one. There are times when we try to please others. But we do not do it in all things or all the time any more than we love God with all our hearts, souls, and minds at all times. Again, no one will ever be in heaven as a result of the Golden Rule, except insofar as God has used it to reveal the person's own lack of perfection and turn him away from his own human goodness to the Savior.

An Internal Standard

There is another point that is obvious from these two great verses that summarize God's standards. Not only is God's standard perfection. Not only is this to be judged by the whole of God's laws, rather than just a part. This standard is also an internal standard, as well as an external one. Thus, it deals with thoughts, motivations, and desires, as well as with actions.

Think for a moment of how Jesus looked at the Pharisees. When other people looked at the Pharisees they saw only what was visible from the outside, for that is all that human beings ever see. From that perspective the Pharisees were not too bad. At least they appeared better than others. Jesus, on the other hand, being God, was able to look at what was going on within, and he saw their motivations. They were striving for righteousness all right, at least as they conceived it, but they were doing it to outdo other people. It was not to please God. Moreover, in spite of their efforts to clean up the outside of their lives the Pharisees were as incapable as anyone else of cleaning up what was inside. On one occasion Jesus expressed this quite pointedly by saying, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like

whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean" (Matt. 23:27).

These words are true of anyone. To a certain extent you and I can pull ourselves up by our bootstraps morally. A thief can reform himself and stop stealing. Having worked off a debt to society, he can even recapture a certain measure of respect and trust from his fellowmen. An alcoholic can overcome his weakness for drink. He can regain useful employment and again become a credit and asset to his family. We admire those who are able to do this. But the truth of the matter is that although we are able to do this outwardly so that people may admire us, as they did the Pharisees, we are nevertheless unable to do anything about the state of our hearts. Thus, we cannot make ourselves loving if we are not loving. We cannot make ourselves humble if we are not humble. Above all, we cannot make ourselves righteous (as God counts righteousness) if we are not.

The Scales of God

We sum it all up, then, and we find that the demand of the law is perfection. This is a perfection in all the law's requirements, and it is an internal perfection as well as an external one. Moreover, we see that all are condemned by this standard. Jesus was right. The law can do only two things, and the bringing of salvation is not one of them. The law can either condemn, or it can point to the Savior.

Has it done that for you? Perhaps I can help you to see this and make a commitment to Christ by an illustration that I first heard from Donald Grey Barnhouse. Sometime ago in a friend's house I came across an old balancing scale, the kind that was once used to measure out most dry goods and produce. It was a large one because my friend's family had been in the bakery business and had used this scale to measure flour and sugar for large recipes. In this type of scale a weight of fixed measure is placed on one side of the balance arm and the item to be weighed on the other. When there is enough flour or sugar or whatever it may be on the side opposite the weight, the arm balances.

Imagine now that you have before you that type of scale and that God has placed the pound measure of his perfection on the one arm. This is the perfection that the law portrays and that God must demand of you on the basis of his nature. Nothing less than perfection—in word, thought, and deed—can satisfy him. What can you furnish to meet his demands?

Here is a criminal, perhaps a thief or a murderer, who comes to present his goodness to God. He is not much by our standards, but even the most critical among us would not deny that he has some goodness. We acknowledge this when we say that there is honor even among thieves. The criminal comes; he places his goodness upon the scale. It is an ounce or two. But an ounce is not a pound, and the scales are unmoved. We set the criminal aside and write over him the words of God's judgment.

The average person now comes forward and places his good works on God's scale. He does much better than the criminal. The average person presents seven or eight ounces. This is three or four times better than the man who has gone before. Still it is not a pound. So the law accuses him also, and he too receives God's judgment.

Finally, the best men and women come forward. These are the acknowledged leaders of our society, just as the scribes and Pharisees were the acknowledged leaders of theirs. They may be social workers, ministers, professors, philanthropists. They are better than the average man. They present eleven or twelve ounces of attainment. Still their eleven or twelve ounces will not budge the scale of God's righteousness, and so they too join the rest of the race and are set aside. The Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

Will a man live by law? Then the law will condemn him. But just here God comes in with his message of free salvation. Notice that he does not change his standard. The law is a good standard. It is the only possible standard. It is just that it cannot save people who have broken it. But God can! The efforts of men cannot move God's balance, but now God is going to move it for us. Jesus comes. He is the Son of God, our Savior. He is the embodiment of that total, internal, and external perfection of mind, soul, and body about which the law has been talking. He had the right to avoid us all. Yet he comes and is put to death for our sins. Since Jesus is the infinite God, his death is sufficient for any number of finite creatures. He was able to take the punishment of the law for an infinite weight of sin and cancel it for us in the hour of his death, so that now sin may be removed and righteousness be made available for all who trust him. God comes to us with the offer of salvation. He tells us that he wants us to be in heaven with him and that he has made the way. "I love you," God says. "I do not care on what level your life has been lived. I only want you to look to my Son who died for you. Do you see him dying there? He died for you. Do you see Christ rising from the tomb? This too is for you, for it is the evidence that I am forever satisfied with his sacrifice. If you will believe in him

and commit yourself to him, I will take that death for your side of the scale. The standard is the same, but I will give my righteousness for your side of the balance." We take that righteousness, the righteousness given to us, and go (some boldly and others falteringly) to God's balance. We place Jesus' righteousness on our side of the scale, and immediately the balance is made. We are justified. We are accepted in the Beloved. God has nothing more against us forever.

Have you done that? Remember, it is not enough to be like the Pharisees. It is not enough to possess the Bible. It is not enough to read the Bible. It is not even enough to study the Bible or memorize the Bible. You must obey the Bible. And it is the Bible that points you away from your own efforts to earn salvation, which you can never do, and instead directs you toward the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Savior.

Chapter 72.
The Fourth Miracle

John 6:1-4

There is only one miracle performed by the Lord Jesus Christ that is recorded by each of the four evangelists—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It is the miracle in which he used only five small barley loaves and two fish to feed over five thousand people in Galilee just before the annual Jewish feast of Passover. It is important, moreover, not just because it is recorded in each of the Gospels but because of all that it signifies. Fortunately, the significance of the feeding of the multitude is spelled out far more clearly by John than by any of the other writers.

Each of the Gospel writers brings out of the story that which spoke to him personally. Matthew and Luke were most interested in the miracle itself, for they tell it without much embellishment. Mark stresses the loving compassion of Jesus; it was out of Jesus' compassion for the multitude, Mark tells us, that Christ fed them. In John the interest revolves around the historical significance of the event—it was a time

of testing and a turning point in Christ's ministry—and around the fact that Jesus is himself the bread that satisfies men spiritually. Only in John do we learn that the miracle took place at the time of the Passover, that the loaves of the young lad were barley loaves (the poorest kind), the reason for gathering up the fragments that remained, and the effect of the miracle on the masses.

Incidentally, the difference in emphasis in the midst of an obvious agreement on all the details of the story by the four writers is evidence of the reliability of these men as historians. The agreements are such that the story could not have been made up by each man separately. The differences are such that they obviously were not collaborating. Thus, if they were not made up separately and if they were not made up in collaboration, the only remaining possibility is that they were not made up at all. They are true. In other words, we have in these accounts (Matt. 14:15-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:12-17; and John 6:1-15) the record of a true though supernatural event recorded accurately by four witnesses.

Anyone who wishes to dispute the factualness of the miracle must deal with such evidence.

A Needy People

The story is not recorded by the Gospel writers as evidence of their reliability, however, but rather to teach Christian truth. So it is to this that we must now turn. John tells us that sometime after the events recorded in the fifth chapter, Jesus, who was now in the north, crossed over to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee where he was followed by a great multitude of people. It was the time of the Passover. Perhaps many of these people were on their way to Jerusalem to observe it, though we do not know this for sure. What we do know is that they were following Jesus because they had seen the miracles he did. Evening had come on as they had been listening to his teaching, and they were hungry.

Jesus anticipated the situation. He turned to Philip and asked a question that, together with the answer, is recorded by John to bring out the first important point in the story. Jesus asked, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" Philip answered to the effect that there was no place to buy it, that even if there were a place the disciples did not have enough money to pay for it, and furthermore that even if they had two hundred denarii (the normal wages of a laborer for six months), even this would not buy enough bread so that each one could have a little. In Philip's reply we have a confession of the failure of human resources in the situation. By extention, we also have an illustration of the failure of human resources in many circumstances of our own.

I do not doubt for a minute that this is one of John's main reasons for recording the story. It is obvious from a doctrinal point of view, of course. For John is soon going to show Jesus to be the One who can meet all needs, and there must always be a recognition of need before there can be a real turning to Jesus for help. But, more than this, the point is evident from John's passing reference to the Passover.

No alert Jewish mind would come to a word like this without thinking somewhat of the significance of the Passover. And it would be hard to miss the fact that the Passover marked the beginning of that period when Israel left the seeming security of Egypt and entered the wilderness where they were entirely dependent upon God. Things had been bad in Egypt, certainly. The people were slaves. They had been treated cruelly. Still, with grit and a little bit of humor a person could get by. In the desert it was different. In the desert there were vast extremes of temperature (from 140 to 160 degrees Fahrenheit in the daytime to below freezing at night). There were no towns and therefore no shops in which to buy food. Above all, there was no water, and without water a man cannot survive. This is the picture that John is setting before us in the opening verses of this chapter and that he is reinforcing specifically by reference to the desert wandering later. It is a picture of the failure of human resources—not only in a physical sense but also in the attempts of a person to please God.

On the physical level we do not need a great deal of reinforcement for this truth. We speak today of the eventual failure of natural resources such as fresh water, soil, natural gas, oil, and so on, due to the rate at which men and women of our century are consuming them. We speak of the failure of emotional resources, such as we find in nervous breakdowns, despair, uncontrolled temper, and such things. These failures are obvious. What is not so obvious is the failure of men and women to please God or to experience the life of God. This failure is invisible, yet it exists also.

You have failed to please God. You have failed to find the life of God by your own efforts. Do you not find that all you are able to do for yourself personally—whether it is in the area of success, wealth, fame, or sex—fails to bring happiness? I hope you have found this to be true, because it is true. Besides, it is only when you or I begin to acknowledge these things to be true that we begin to see and accept the solution.

The Sufficiency of Jesus Christ

The second point of this story, which is also the second reason why John tells it, is that Jesus Christ is all-sufficient. This is important particularly where human resources fail.

The matter of eating assumed a far greater importance in an ancient culture than it does for most of us who are living today. When we want something we merely go to the store for it, and it is rare when we cannot buy all we want. In ancient times it was different. Harvests were uncertain. There was not always enough to eat. As a result, to have enough food was considered a great blessing, and food itself became a symbol of prosperity. This is seen all through the Old Testament. For instance, at the beginning of Isaiah we read, "If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land" (1:19). Isaiah later said, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is

good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare" (55:1-2). David wrote, "The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the LORD will praise him" (Ps. 22:26). We can see that this was also an important idea in Christ's time, for later on in this same chapter the Lord declared to his hearers, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35).

Men and women find their real spiritual prosperity in God. We cannot find it on the human level. We cannot find the abundant life by indulging ourselves in all that life has to offer. We cannot find happiness by pursuing it. We cannot create satisfaction. These great blessings come from God. So we must feed on God as he is presented to us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you feed upon him? Do you come to him expecting to be fed?

There is a point here that becomes quite interesting in the actual working out of the story. In everyday business terms we would say that the supply outstripped the demand. We know it because, after the miracle had taken place and everyone eating had been filled, there were still twelve baskets of food left over. Food in abundance! It is always like that with God. In his valuable commentary Arthur W. Pink observes that when Abraham went up to intercede with God on behalf of the righteous in Sodom, God never ceased granting until Abraham had ceased asking. So also in the case of Elisha's oil. So long as there were empty vessels to be found in the land, the vessel of the widow who was helped by Elisha did not cease its supply. Pink writes, "This is what Jesus does to all His people. He comes to the poor bankrupt believer, and, placing in his hand a draft on the resources of heaven, says to him, 'Write on it what thou wilt.' Such is our precious Lord still. If we are straightened, it is not in Him, but in ourselves. If we are poor and weak, or tried and tempted, it is not that we cannot help ourselves—it is because we do not.... We have so little faith in things unseen and eternal. We draw so little on the resources of Christ. We come not to Him with our spiritual wants—our empty vessels—and draw from the ocean of His grace."

There is a hymn that acknowledges this beautifully, though it is not widely known in America. It was written by Mary Shekleton.

I am an empty vessel—not one thought
Or look of love, I ever to Thee brought;
Yet I may come, and come again to Thee
With this, the empty sinner's
only plea— Thou lovest me.
Oh, fill me, Jesus Savior, with Thy love!
Lead, lead me to the living fount above;
Thither may I, in simple faith, draw nigh,
And never to another
fountain fly, But unto
Thee.

Have you asked God to do that, to supply what you need? Have you asked him really? God says that he is more than willing to fill the empty vessel of your life, in fact, that he is urging you to let him fill it. The Bible says, "And my God will supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

How about you who are running away from God? You are unhappy, but you have never come to the point where you are willing to say, "Lord God, I have been running away from you and I have failed to recognize your claim on my life." You are unhappy. In some cases you are miserable. Why do you not stop running? Turn to Jesus and see if he is not able to satisfy you completely. You may be one who is tempted—perhaps in your home, perhaps out of your home.

It may be a small thing; it may be a very great thing. Whatever it is, Jesus is sufficient for it. The Book of Hebrews says that Jesus was tempted as we are and is therefore able to help us in temptations (Heb. 4:15-16). Paul writes that God provides a way of escape in all temptations (1 Cor. 10:13). Perhaps your need is for comfort. You have lost a friend or relative, a wife, a husband. You are alone. Human resources have failed. Turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the source of

all comfort. He will provide it. Ask him. You are wise if you ask him for everything for which you stand in need.

Has God Forgotten?

This story contains a lesson for anyone who feels that God has forgotten him or her. Do you feel that way? If you do, notice that long before the disciples had expressed any interest in the welfare of the people, Jesus had initiated the matter of feeding them. He had spoken of it to Philip, knowing in advance what he was going to do. The disciples were interested—to a degree. They probably were hungry, too, so their concern would have been spurred on by self-interest. Still, whatever interest they may have had, the interest of the Lord Jesus Christ in the people was greater.

That is an encouragement for us, both if we fail to show concern for others—the multitudes about ourselves—or if we are one of the multitude and so feel forgotten. Let us take our attitude toward others first. We often fail to see human need. We miss the cry of loneliness, despair, or frustration expressed by some poor soul. Jesus hears it. Our hearts may be cold, but the heart of Jesus is warm with compassion.

Or suppose you are one of the lonely ones. Even when there are other people who *are* interested in you, that interest still is always imperfect and partial. There are people in your home, office, or church who care for you, particularly if they are Christian people. But they are beset by all the sin and failure that is common to men and women. Only One will not fail you. There is only One whose interest does not waver. Jesus is eternal. He existed before the worlds began. He created you. He planned the circumstances of your life. He knows your situation. It is this One who desires to supply all your need according to his abundant resources.

Do you say that you cannot see it? There is no reason why you should. Just trust him. The patriarch Jacob, Abraham's grandson, was in his old age and was complaining about the harsh blows that life had dealt him. Years before, his son Joseph had been killed by wild animals, so he

thought. Then famine had come, and he had sent ten of his remaining sons to Egypt to buy food. He had kept Benjamin, the youngest, at home. The sons came back, but without Simeon, who had been left as a hostage. When the famine continued it became necessary to send the sons back to Egypt for more food, but they refused to go, saying they could not return without Benjamin. The man in charge in Egypt had told them that if they did not return with Benjamin he would consider them liars about their family and would treat them as spies. Jacob was greatly distressed. He fought the inevitable. All things seemed against him. But it was at this moment that God was planning his greatest blessing for him. God knew the end from the beginning, and he cared about Jacob. He had actually sent Joseph to Egypt years in advance to prepare for this moment. Joseph was the man in charge. It was only when Jacob gave in to the situation that God brought to completion the blessing of a full reunion of all the brothers and their father in their new land.

Maybe you are going through a situation like that in your own life. Do not wring your hands and say, "God has forgotten." Trust him. He knows your need and where he is leading you.

Chapter 73.
Three and the Master

John 6:5-9

Not long ago I had an opportunity to attend a seminar on management skills conducted by the Servicemaster Industries Corporation. Many parts of the seminar were useful and instructive, but one part in particular impressed me as being of value in understanding this part of John's Gospel. There was an attempt to define management. The definition given was: "Management is getting the right things done through other people." This definition relates to Christ's miracle of feeding the five thousand people in Galilee because, among other things, the story gives us a splendid example of good management.

What did Jesus do on this occasion? He fed a great company of people, of course. But what precisely did he *do?* Or, we might ask, how did he do it? He could have lifted up his hands and have demanded that manna come down from heaven. It would have come. He could have created a loaf of bread in each man's pocket. But Jesus did not do these things. Instead, he began to work through others—Philip, the lad, and Andrew. They helped. Thus, Jesus managed to get the job done through other people.

Philip

The first person the Lord turned to was Philip. Philip was from Bethsaida, and Bethsaida was in that area. It was natural that Jesus should turn to Philip, therefore, for Philip more than anyone else knew what food was available. The difficulty was that Philip got all caught up in his knowledge—perhaps he was proud that he knew that area of the country and could tell that there was no place to buy anything—and so forgot to turn the matter over to Jesus. In simple language, John tells us that Jesus asked Philip about food to test him and implies that Philip failed the test.

Philip had been confronted with a trying situation, much as we often are confronted. But his response was that which far too often is our own. A bill comes in the mail, and it is larger than the balance remaining in your checking account. What do you do? Do you wring your hands and say, "How in the world am I ever going to pay this bill?" Or do you take it to the Lord? You have a problem in your home, perhaps with your children or with your husband or wife. Do you say, "What is happening? How will I ever survive?" Or do you take it to the Lord? There is a problem at work. Do you say, "I don't know the answer; I'll just have to work weekends and work it out somehow"? Or do you take it to the Lord? You and I will have learned a great deal about walking with the Lord when we have learned to spread each difficulty before him as it comes along.

One hindrance to doing this is sometimes pride in our knowledge, the same hindrance that faced Philip. Philip was so flattered at being asked

this question that he began to show off his knowledge and, in showing off his knowledge, actually revealed his ignorance. Knowledge can be a blessing, but it can also be a handicap to trusting the Lord. When placed in Christ's hands, it is valuable. When trusted in itself, it is not.

There was a second reason why Philip failed the test Jesus gave him. Philip not only had knowledge of the area where the miracle took place. He also had a head for figures, and this in turn led him to trust money. He began to calculate. He said to himself, "Let's see now, there are about a hundred people in that little group... there are about two hundred over there... two hundred... six hundred... Now if we gave everyone just a little bit, that would be so many times a few cents and...." Then he gave Jesus the result of his calculations. He said, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite" (v. 7). Philip calculated, but he calculated without Christ.

I am convinced that if there is any one thing that most plagues Christian organizations in our day it is the thought that we can figure out the situation and then accomplish God's work primarily by means of money. I must not be misunderstood at this point, however. I said a moment ago that knowledge is a good thing if it is placed in Christ's hands. This is true also of money. Money can be well used. But to think that the needs of men and women can be met merely by collecting funds, even for an evangelical cause—it is this that is debilitating.

Moreover, it limits our vision. We think that when we are talking money and raising money we are thinking big, but actually, compared with God's plans for us, the opposite is generally the case. Think of Philip. He said, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a *bite."* Imagine even talking about "a little" in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ! Yet we do that also. We have seen God work, as Philip had seen him work. But we come to him and say, "Oh, God, if you would just do so and so—it's just a little thing—if you would just do it, I believe I could get by." Actually, Christ's desire is to bless us *abundantly.*

Let us use our knowledge. Let us use our money. Let us use anything else God gives to us. But above all, let us look to God himself. Let us have that kind of vision for our own lives, our church, and our communities that stretches our minds and causes us to throw ourselves upon God. Let us say, "It is not just a little bit that we desire, our Father. We are not praying to have a little but to have much."

Someone might say, "But Philip had an excuse, didn't he? After all, he didn't know what Christ could do." I am not sure that this is a valid excuse. John has recorded several miracles that had taken place already. At the beginning of chapters 5 and 6 he has indicated a lapse of time in which, according to the other evangelists, other miracles had been performed also. Philip had been with Christ. He had seen these things. But when the question was put to him for this new situation his faith was inadequate. He said, "Yes, I know that you changed the water into wine at Cana. I know that you healed the son of the nobleman. I know that you made the paralyzed man walk. But I am not sure that you can do it for me." We say that. We see God working with others, but we do not allow that knowledge to carry over into our own lives.

There is nothing that God has done in the life of any other Christian at any period of history that he is not able to do in you if that is his plan for your life. You can know this. Moreover, you can know that if he has placed something in your life for a test, he has done it in order that you and others might see him bring blessing.

The Lad

The second person Jesus dealt with in this story was the lad. It is interesting to think about him for a moment. What do we know about him? For one thing, we know that he was poor. We know this because we are told by John that his lunch was composed largely of barley bread. Barley bread was the cheapest of all bread and was held in contempt. Thus, as William Barclay notes, barley bread was the kind of bread prescribed by the Mishnah as a meal offering for the sin of adultery because, says the Mishnah, adultery is the sin of a beast and barley is the food of beasts.

This kind of contempt is similar to that which Samuel Johnson had for Scotland when, in his famous dictionary, he defined oats as "a grain which in England is fed to horses and in Scotland is fed to people." The lad had this bread and with it two small, pickled fish to help make the dry, coarse bread go down.

Moreover, we know that the boy was insignificant. Someone has said, "There is nothing in this world so insignificant as a boy." From a human point of view this often is true. Here was a small boy, poor and insignificant. Yet that boy did something that set him apart from all the other boys who may have been in the crowd that day. That boy gave his lunch, poor as it was, to the Lord Jesus. That lunch was as insignificant as it could be. It was as insignificant as the boy was. But the point of the story is that the insufficient from the hands of the insignificant became sufficient and significant when placed in the hands of Jesus.

It is true through the whole of biblical history. What is as insignificant as dust? Nothing! You cannot even plant crops in it. Yet the dust became man when molded by the hands of the Creator. The jawbone of an ass is insignificant. But God used a jawbone in the hands of Samson to kill one thousand of the enemies of Israel. A shepherd's rod is insignificant, but it became powerful when God placed it in the hands of Moses. A sling is unimportant, but God used it in the hands of David to kill Goliath. And what is as insignificant as a poor girl, a virgin, in a distant town of the Roman empire? Yet God took one such girl, a girl named Mary, and used her to bring forth the Redeemer.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that what you have is insignificant and therefore useless. You may compare your gift with all the great talents of this world—at least, those you think to be great—and imagine that your gift is worthless. But if you do that you are forgetting to figure on God and God's desires. What is it after all that makes a gift great in God's service? It is not the magnitude of the gift. It is into whose hands it is given. If you will take what you have, no matter how small or how great it may be, and place it in the hands of the Master, you will find that it is more than sufficient for whatever task he sets before you.

What is your gift? Are you one who because of your age or your circumstances simply has time on your hands that many others, who are already engaged in work or projects, do not have? If so, that is a gift. Ask God to show you how you can use your time in his service. Perhaps you have money? I spoke earlier of the danger of trusting money rather than God, but that does not mean for a moment that you cannot place your money in Christ's hands to be used by him, if you have it. Recently a man who had joined our church, and has since helped us in many ways, told me that one of the reasons why he joined was that he realized our need for money and wished to help out where he was able. He recognized that much of our work is with students who contribute little toward our expenses. Perhaps God has given you abilities in administration, understanding the thoughts and problems of others, communicating the gospel.

If you think you may have any of these raw materials, you need to do two things. First, you need to ask God to clarify your gift so you will understand what it is exactly that he has given you. Second, you need to place it in his wonderful hands.

Andrew

We have considered already two important people in this story—Philip and the lad. There is a wonderful contrast between them, and much more could be said. But I do not want to end this study without looking at one more person. That person is Andrew, another of Christ's disciples.

I have learned over the years in which I have been preaching that some persons have a disposition for sermon outlines. They can figure them out almost as fast as the preacher. If you are one of these people, you probably have been wondering for some time why I did not mention Andrew sooner. The normal course of a study such as this would have been to speak of Philip and Andrew—they were disciples—and then the lad who had lunch. I have done it this way for a special reason. Philip was the first who was approached; he had the wrong answer. He was so caught up in his knowledge and in his ability with figures that he forgot

Jesus. The lad was the one who responded, for he had something to give and was not too sophisticated or self-conscious to give it. But Andrew —Andrew was in Philip's position entirely so far as having anything to give was concerned. He had no food, just as Philip had no food. But Andrew went and got the lad.

Do you see what I am saying? I spoke in the beginning of how Jesus Christ was a good manager, according to the definition: "Management is getting the right things done through other people." By this definition Jesus was a first-rate manager in approaching Philip. But that is only what we might expect. The additional interesting and exciting point is that Andrew in imitation of Christ learned to be a good manager also. He said, "I do not have anything to offer, but I will go and see who does." It may be that you can be an Andrew. You yourself may not have the gift that is needed, but you can see what is needed and recruit someone who has it.

Moreover, I sometimes think as I read this story of the profound effect Andrew's approach must have had on the boy. Apart from what Andrew did that day in Galilee that boy was just like any other boy. He would have come and heard Jesus. But he would have been back on the far edge of the crowd somewhere, and the next day (after the people had gone) he would have been back home playing with his marbles. But Andrew got him. Andrew brought him into contact with the Lord Jesus and expanded his horizons. What is more, I am convinced that as the result of what Andrew did that boy went away remembering the day for as long as he lived. It will not surprise me in the slightest to find that boy in heaven someday, having later (as a result of this day's experience coupled with the preaching of Christ's death and resurrection) come to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior.

I thank God for those who did the work of Andrew for me. One of those was Donald Grey Barnhouse, the founder of the *Bible Study Hour* and a former pastor of the church I now serve. I was just a boy in the western part of Pennsylvania. So far as I knew, nothing of great importance ever happened in our town. But Barnhouse came there one year. Someone forgot to meet him at the airport, so he ended up in our house. He had

known my parents from the years they had spent in Philadelphia. He stayed not only for that night but for each night of a ten-week series, and then for another ten-week series a couple of years later. During those weeks I had the privilege of sitting at the dining room table after school and listening to him as he talked about the state of the world and of what God was doing in various parts of it. He talked about the Bible, of what he was going to preach that evening, of what he was writing. All of this expanded my horizons, and I began to think of the day when I would preach, even though I did not know then that it would eventually be from the pulpit he was then occupying.

Where Is the Man?

Each of us has ways of measuring the importance of things in this world. Often we measure things by success. We look at this world and we consider those with power and wealth and extra intelligence to be important. God never measures things in this way. God tells us that the principal characters on the world stage generally are not those whom the world thinks prominent, but rather those who have surrendered whatever they have been given into his hands.

Will you do that? You may be looking only at your littleness, instead of looking at God's greatness. You may be complaining that your talents or opportunities are not great. You may be discouraged because your talents do not seem up to the tasks set before you. If any of these things are true, you need to remember that God used a little slave girl to bring the leper Naaman in touch with his healing power. He used a widow to provide the necessities of life for the prophet Elisha. Joseph was only a slave, but God used him to save both Egypt and Israel. We have already seen in this Gospel how God used the woman of Samaria, a prostitute, to save a whole town.

One day Dwight L. Moody overheard a man say, "The world has yet to see what God will do through one man who is fully surrendered to him." Moody answered—will you say it also?— "By the grace of God I am going to be that man."

Chapter 74.
Who's in Charge?

John 6:10-15

There is a very old proverb that says, "Nothing succeeds like success." The only difficulty is that the proverb does not say what success helps us succeed in doing.

In chapter 1 at the beginning of our study of the fifth chapter of John, I pointed out that there are two dangers that come to anyone who is seeking to please the Lord and walk in his way. They are: the danger of success and the danger of hostility. In John's Gospel the danger of hostility comes first, so we discussed that in connection with our study of Jesus's reaction to the hostility of the Jewish leaders in chapter 5. When a person determines to live as Jesus has called him to live, that person can be certain that there will be some measure of hostility from the world, even at times from his Christian friends. This causes some followers of the Lord to become discouraged and to pull back from a full commitment. We have seen in our earlier studies that this did not happen to Jesus, and we saw why.

The second danger is the danger of success. This is no less frightening. Something can take place in the Christian's life that is so encouraging spiritually that the Christian becomes enamored with his success and comes to depend upon himself spiritually. He then goes off under his own wisdom, building a superstructure that is not of God's design. It is one rather of his own making. Those who gain reputations for themselves as Christian crusaders often provide us with examples of this, and the ends to which they go and the non-Christian means they employ to get there are disheartening. Fortunately, Jesus faced this danger also and was victorious.

Little Knowledge

In the sixth chapter of John we are told that after Jesus had used the five barley loaves and the two fish provided by the lad to feed five thousand

people, the people who had witnessed the miracle determined to make him their king. In other words, they wanted to make him a political Messiah who would drive out the Romans.

This was wrong, of course, but the people for all their selfishness were not entirely unperceptive about what Jesus had done. For one thing, they were Jews and so possessed a religious heritage in which the idea of a Messiah was prominent. For another, they knew that in the law God had promised Moses that one day he would raise up a leader like himself. God had said, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him" (Deut. 18:18). Knowledge of this promise explains the reaction of the people in saying, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14). It also explains two other references in John in which the people wonder if some prominent figure might not be that "prophet" (1:21; 7:40).

Moreover, the people who had witnessed the miracle also knew of other verses that promised a certain measure of material prosperity to be provided by the Messiah during the days of his earthly rule. In fact, in Psalm 132:15 there is a promise that the Messiah would provide bread for the hungry. It says, "I will bless her with abundant provisions; her poor will I satisfy with food."

The people looked at these promises, filtering them through their own desires and prejudices, and then concluded, "Jesus is the Messiah. He is the One whom we should make king." The only difficulty was that they did not know the Scriptures as well as they should have known them and so made a big mistake. They knew that the Messiah was to be a great prophet. They knew that he was to be a great king. But they had failed to see that in between being a great prophet and a great king Jesus also had to be a great priest. In this role he was to offer up himself for the sins of the people. Jesus was a prophet, of course. He was speaking for God the Father. He would one day be king. We rightly sing:

> Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
> Does his successive journeys run;

His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

But before Jesus could be king he had to die. It was necessary for him to give his life "a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

Jesus knew these truths. He knew the Scriptures. Therefore, he did not allow the enthusiasm of the people based on the physical miracle to deter him from the proper path. We can apply this by saying that you and I must know Scripture well also if we are not to allow spiritual success to succeed in turning us away from God to our own plans and devices.

A Selfish Reaction

We need to say, too, that the reaction of the people to Christ's miracle was not altogether noble, even though it was partially scriptural. In fact, the more one thinks of the motives of the mob in wanting to make Jesus king, the less altruistic the reaction seems to be.

For one thing, the crowd was willing to support Jesus *only so long as he gave them what they wanted*. This means that their support was for selfish reasons. We see proof of this in their concern for more bread expressed later. We also see proof of it in the fact that within a short while another group of people just like this (perhaps even containing some of the same individuals, for these may have been on their way to the Passover) were crying out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" There is such a thing as bought loyalty, and these people were expressing it.
They were grateful for the meal. But their gratitude was that kind of gratitude referred to by Samuel Johnson, who defined it as "a lively sense of favours still to come."

When we begin to think along these lines the attitude of the mob repels us. But are we so very different? William Barclay writes at this point in his commentary, "When we want comfort in sorrow, when we want strength in difficulty, when we want peace in turmoil, when we want help when life has got us down, there is no one so wonderful as Jesus. Then we talk to Him and walk with Him and open our hearts to Him.

But when He comes to us with some stern demand for sacrifice, with some challenge to effort, with the offer of some cross, then we will have nothing to do with Him. When we examine our hearts, it may be that we will find that we too love Jesus for what we can get out of Him, and when He comes to us with His great challenges and demands we too grow lukewarm, and even resentful and hostile to this disturbing and demanding
Christ."

This is one reason why the Bible speaks so plainly of the need to deny self and selfish desires as a Christian. Many verses speak along these lines, often using the ideas of death, crucifixion with Christ, and denial. For instance, Romans 6:4 says that we are to be "buried with him through baptism into death." Two verses farther on we read, "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (v. 6). The first part of Galatians 2:20 declares, "I have been crucified with Christ." In Galatians 6:14 Paul writes, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Along with the message of death and denial there is also the message of resurrection and fulfillment. But, still, denial comes first. There must be a death to self before there can be an abundance of spiritual blessing.

What does it mean that we are to die to self? What does it mean that we are to be crucified with Jesus? Simply put, it means that we are to say no to anything that lies outside the will of God for our lives. This is true before conversion. We must say no to any plans we may have for earning God's favor and instead receive God's gift of eternal life in Christ. It also is true after our conversion, for the same principles that operated in our coming to Christ continue in the Christian life. We must say no to all our plans and personal desires (or at least be willing to say no) so that God's will rather than our own may be accomplished.

Here is an important question. I have said that we must say no or at least be willing to say no to anything that is contrary to the will of God in our lives. But how do we know when we have really said no? Our

hearts and minds are subtle. It is easy to fool ourselves. How do we know when we have really said no to that which is contrary to the will of God in our lives? The answer is: When we have stopped complaining.

The Word of God has a good word for what we do when we really have not stopped complaining. It is the word "murmur." This is what the people of Israel did when they were in the wilderness and did not like what God was doing with them. It also is the word used by the ungrateful servants in Christ's parable about the householder. What is murmuring? Murmuring is expressing rebellion against something by mumbling under one's breath. It is called murmuring because that is what murmuring sounds like to anyone who is listening.

That is what we do with God. God tells us to do something, and the first thing we do is attempt to stare him down. We want to see if he really means it. After we find that he really does mean it, we murmur. And the reason we murmur is that we really do not want to do what he wants us to do. If you do that, then you are in the company of the great crowd who only supported Jesus when he gave them what they wanted. Grow up! Come to the point where you no longer murmur but say instead, "Yes, Lord, you know best." When you do that you will go away happy and fulfilled, because he does know best.

The Roman Yoke

There is also a second reason why the people were wrong in the particular kind of support they gave to Jesus: *they wanted to use him.* They wanted to use him instead of allowing him to use them and mold them into the kind of people he wanted them to be.

This is understandable, of course. The people had a great problem in their day. It was the occupation of their country by the Roman forces. Actually, this was not as bad as they probably imagined it was. For one thing, the Romans brought a measure of law and civilization. They built good roads and buildings. There really was such a thing as the Roman peace, and many of the conquered nations recognized this. However,

the Jews did not. They were a fiercely independent people. Jews chaffed under this Roman yoke, and that which they most desired to have happen in their lifetime was to have the Roman yoke thrown off. Suddenly there was this unusual man Jesus. He had miraculous power. So they must have said something like this to themselves,
"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could get him on our side and get him to help us drive out the Romans?"
It is clear that the desire of this crowd was to make use of Jesus, far more than to be used by him. But again, are we really very different, many of us?

I think there are several ways in which we try to use the Lord Jesus Christ. One obvious example is the attempt to justify prejudice by appealing to the Scriptures. At times this has taken the totally unsupportable position that the African American race is descended from Ham, that Ham was placed under a curse by God, and that this therefore justifies any attempts to subject the African American to slavery. This is unbiblical, dishonest, and mean. Yet it has been done. It is a clear case of attempting to use Christ or use the Bible for wicked ends.

A second example is in the area of politics. Politicians love to quote the Bible. They quote it in support of any program they desire. Probably it is not even too cynical to suggest that as a rule they develop their programs first and get their supporting quotations second. There is no political program so ill-conceived that it cannot be justified by someone at some point by an appeal to Jesus Christ or biblical authority.

Finally, we use the Lord Jesus Christ to justify the American way of life. Do not misunderstand me here. I do not want to downplay America. We have been greatly blessed by God in this land. We probably have had a higher percentage of Christian people in America than in any other land at any period of history, with the possible exception of England under Cromwell or during the Wesleyan revivals. This has produced real advantages. Yet it also is true that today there is much that is not only non-Christian but even anti-Christian at all levels

of our society and national life. The Lord Jesus Christ cannot be used to justify these things. He does not justify all that big business or labor does. He does not lend his support to Madison Avenue. You cannot quote Jesus in your pursuit of the second car, the second home, the lavish vacation, the indulgence of yourself in leisure time, and many other things that some consider their right. Some of these things may be God's gift to you. But if you are pursuing these things rather than pursuing God, spiritual growth, and advance in his plan for your life, if you are quoting the Bible as support of your inverted value system, then you are merely doing what the people who were fed by Jesus did. You are using him rather than allowing him to use you and mold you into the kind of person he would have you be.

Billions of Christs

What does Jesus want you to be? One answer to that question is from the eighth chapter of Romans in which God's purpose in calling an individual to himself is spelled out. It says, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (8:29). What is the purpose? It is that each one who has been called by God to faith in Jesus Christ might become like Christ so that—I say it reverently—eventually there might be many billions of Christs where there was only one before. The wonderful thing is that this can be done in us whatever our situation in life, whether we are rich or poor, educated or uneducated, black or white, male or female, or whatever it may be.

Moreover, it is only when we allow Jesus Christ to do that in us that we achieve any importance. If we take God and attempt to use him to justify what we want to do, all we succeed in doing is making Christianity petty. It becomes bounded by our own limited horizons. But if we allow God to use us, then no matter how insignificant we may seem as the world looks at things, we become important spiritually. For the Lord Jesus Christ himself is seen in the conduct of his followers.

Chapter 75.
The Fifth Miracle

John 6:16-21

If you have ever been to the Near East—to Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, or Syria—you may have seen the oriental silversmiths working in the great bazaars. They work with coins that have been given to them by Western tourists, melting them down, and then forming them into small pieces of jewelry. Eventually they sell them back to any of the tourists who will buy them. This is done in a primitive way. Generally there is a small furnace over which sits a pot containing the molten silver. The coin is dropped in and melted. Every so often the silversmith goes over to the pot of silver, looks into it, scrapes off a bit of the dross that has collected, and then returns to his work. After a while he looks in, finds that the silver is ready, and begins to form it.

"Why do you constantly look into the silver?" we might ask.

The silversmith would answer, "I look into the silver until I find that the dross is all gone and the silver purified; I know when the dross is gone, because I can see myself reflected in the silver as in a fine mirror."

Here is the explanation of that wonderful passage in Malachi in which God tells us that he shall sit like a "refiner and purifier of silver," and of why Christians are so often called upon to go through the fires and testings of this life. God wants to make us like the Lord Jesus Christ. He does it by working to remove the dross of our lives, until his image is reflected in us for the world to see. The Bible tells us, "The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son" (Heb. 12:6). This principle is illustrated in the story now before us.

The Storm

In the sixth chapter of John we are told that after the multitude who had been fed with the loaves and fish in Galilee had tried to make Jesus king, Jesus slipped away from them. He went up into a mountain alone

to pray. We do not know how long he was gone. But the day wore on, and the disciples eventually went down to the Sea of Galilee and got into a boat in order to sail back to Capernaum. We must not think that they were rude in doing this, still less that they had forgotten
Jesus, for Mark in his account of the incident tells us that Jesus had instructed them to go home (Mark 6:45). This is the first great fact of the story, for it means that Jesus himself had sent them across the lake by boat knowing full well what was to happen.

The night came on and with the night a great storm. This was a wind storm, as we can tell from the story, the kind that comes up quickly on the Sea of Galilee. Mark and Matthew tell us that the wind was against them. John adds that "a strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough" (v. 18). This storm was dangerous. Besides this it made rowing difficult, for they rowed into the fourth watch of the night. That is, they began at dusk and rowed until approximately 3:00 A.M. or dawn.

I wonder what the disciples were thinking about as they rowed their boat through the storm for those six or seven dangerous hours. They were worried, no doubt. But did they ever think of Jesus and of his power to help them? Did they realize that even then they were in his care?

They should have recognized this, of course. In fact, it is even evident that Jesus sent them into the storm to teach them this lesson and to help their faith grow. For one thing, they had just witnessed Christ's care in the feeding of the multitudes. Here were at least five thousand people, many of whom Jesus and the disciples undoubtedly did not even know personally. Yet Jesus cared for them and fed them. Do you suppose that the disciples sensed that Jesus was able to care for them too? Did they trust him? Or did they do what we sometimes do—assume that this situation was different, that the power of Jesus was limited, or that he did not know of their predicament? The miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish should have taught them that Jesus did know, that his power was adequate, and that he did care.

For another thing, the disciples had already witnessed the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to calm troubled waters. This particular story from an earlier period in Christ's ministry is not told in John's Gospel, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record it (Matt. 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25), indicating that it took place before the feeding of the multitude in Galilee. Sometime before the multiplying of the loaves, Jesus and his disciples had been in Galilee and had wished to cross from the more settled western shore of the Sea of Tiberias to the eastern shore inhabited by the Gadarenes. Jesus was exhausted from his preaching and fell asleep in the rear of the boat. A storm arose. The boat began to fill with water. The disciples feared that they would be drowned. They woke Jesus up crying, "Master, don't you care that we are about to perish? "Jesus arose and then quietly calmed the sea. He asked them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have such small faith?"

Did the disciples remember this in the midst of the new storm as once again they found themselves rowing across the Sea of Galilee? Did they trust Christ to protect them? Or did they argue, as we do, that this time Jesus was not actually with them and could do nothing?

A thought that I find amusing has sometimes occurred to me as I have read this story. A few verses before this we are told that the disciples had collected twelve baskets of food left over from the feeding. What happened to these twelve baskets? I find it difficult to imagine that they threw the bread away after just having taken pains to gather the fragments up. The disciples could have taken the fragments with them. And in that case evidence of Jesus' supernatural ability and power would have been under their very noses as they rowed through the tempest.

I am not sure that there is a certain answer to be given to the question of whether the disciples had learned to trust Jesus or else were fearful, but as I read the story and contrast it with the earlier incident I sense that their faith had grown. In the earlier account we are told they were fearful. In this account, even though they were frightened when Jesus came walking on the water (they thought he was a ghost), we are not

told that they were frightened by the storm. We are told only that they kept rowing.

Whatever the case, at length Jesus came toward them. This is the point at which Peter asked permission to walk toward him and did so for a time, although John omits this part of the experience. Jesus said, "It is I; don't be afraid." After this, John tells us, they were immediately at the land to which they went.

Growth of Faith

What did the disciples learn through this experience? It was a kind of testing—a trial by water if you will. It proved that, on the basis of their former experience, they had learned to trust Jesus a bit more. But what did they learn this time? What did they learn in this experience? I believe they learned at least three things, all of which are highlighted in the various accounts of the story. First, they learned that, although they had not been aware of it, *Jesus was watching.* He knew what they were going through. Probably he told them this afterward, for Mark explains that when he was up on the mountain alone "he saw the disciples straining at the oars" (Mark 6:48). This is understandable when we remember that these events took place at the time of the Passover, when there was always a full moon, and that it was a windstorm, rather than a rainstorm with clouds, that churned the water.

Have the experiences through which you have gone taught you that Jesus is watching you and knows your circumstances? He does not make things too easy for any of us. He knows that muscles that are never used grow flabby. We must row in rough weather sometimes. There is work to be done. But do we know, even as we do the work, that Jesus' eye is upon us?

This is true in one sense for all men. It is one truth involved in the doctrine of the immanence of God. The immanence of God means quite simply that God is here. We can say that God is everywhere, and this is right too. But it is far more personal to say that God is where we are. He is here, wherever you or I may be. Take these examples. Adam sinned

and in his panic of guilt tried to do the impossible: he tried to hide from God. At one time David must have had wild thoughts of trying to escape from God, for he wrote. "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" He then proceeded to celebrate the glory of the divine immanence. "If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast" (Ps. 139:7-10). Solomon exclaimed, "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). Paul assured the Athenians that God "is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being'" (Acts 17:27-28).

If it is true that God is not far from anyone, that he sees what we do and knows all about us, how much more true it is that Jesus sees his own followers and knows what they are facing in all their circumstances! He has told us that not "a sparrow" falls to the ground without his knowledge and that the hairs of our head are "all numbered" (Matt. 10:29-31). He said, "And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Do you realize that he is with you? Do you sense that his eye is upon you as it was upon the disciples?

The second truth the disciples learned is that *Jesus helps*. Jesus watches us, it is true. But he does not watch with some kind of serene, unmoved detachment. He watches us in order to help. And he does help—at all times, of course, but particularly when life becomes too burdensome for us and when spiritual victory seems beyond our grasp.

At this point in his commentary William Barclay tells the story of a teacher in a little country school in England. She had told this story to the children; and she must have told it well, for the children obviously got the point. Some short time afterward there was a great snowstorm. The teacher had the job of getting the children home. Sometimes she practically had to drag them through the drifts. It was tiring. Finally, when they were nearly exhausted with the struggle, she overheard one of the youngest children say in his best British manner, half to himself,

"We could be doing with that chap Jesus here now." Well, we could always be doing with Jesus and we never, no matter how difficult the circumstances, have to do without him.

Unfortunately, we often do without him, because we do not wait for his help or listen to his voice. In *Let Me Illustrate,* a collection of stories and illustrations from the writings of Donald Grey Barnhouse, there is a story of a man who owned an icehouse. One day he lost a fine watch in the sawdust. He offered a reward to anyone who would find it; and many went through the sawdust with rakes searching for the timepiece. No one could find the watch. Finally, when the searchers left the building for lunch, a small boy went into the icehouse. A few minutes later he came out with the watch. The men asked how he had found it, and he replied, "I just lay down in the sawdust and listened. Finally, I heard the watch ticking." Dr. Barnhouse then concludes, "Some of you have lost more than a watch. If you will be very still and listen quietly, the Lord will speak to you and show you just where you lost the power and victory which you so sorely miss."

Finally, the disciples learned that *Jesus was also able to bring them home.* He not only helped; he got them to the place they were going. John indicates this aspect of the story by reporting, "Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading" (v.21).

Jesus is able also to get you where you are going. Or, to put it more correctly, he is able to get you to the place to which he has called you or to which you are sent. This is true in life. If he has called you to be a missionary, he will see that you become one whatever the difficulties. If he has called you to a life of quiet witness in a drab undesirable spot, he will give you strength to make your witness there. He will help you in the shop, the home, the church, or wherever you may be.

Moreover, he also will see you safely through this life to your final home in heaven. I do not know whether John had this meaning in mind as he recorded this story. He could have, for he obviously saw levels of spiritual truth in each of the miracles he narrates. Still, whether or not

John himself was thinking of this, what could be more descriptive of our age than that which John tells us was true of the evening in which the disciples crossed the lake—a stormy sea, a strong wind, a dark night? This we face. At times we cannot even see where we are headed. But we shall see Jesus one day, and he himself will guide us into port.

The psalmist says, "Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this" (Ps. 37:5).

Becoming a Christian

But then, finally, I may be speaking to someone who has never trusted in Jesus Christ and who is saying, "Yes, it is all very well to speak to Christians like that. I suppose that they can know where they are going. But I do not know where I am going. I am not a Christian, and I do not know how to become one."

If you are saying that, let me explain the matter for you. In order to become a Christian there are two things you must believe and one thing you must do. First, you must believe on the authority of God's Word that you cannot help yourself spiritually. You can help yourself in this life. You can gain praise from others for your character or good works, but none of this will satisfy God. You are a sinner and are therefore as helpless as the disciples were in the midst of the storm.

Second, you must believe that Jesus is able to do what you cannot do. You cannot save yourself, but he can save you. You cannot satisfy God by means of your own character, but Jesus has already satisfied him and God is willing to place his character to your account. Jesus died for you to remove your sin. He rose so that you might know that God is satisfied with what Jesus has done on your behalf forever.

Finally, you must commit yourself to him. The Bible speaks of this in different ways, but in each case it is clear that it involves an act of our will. It says that we are to believe in Jesus, which means that we are to place ourselves in his hands. It says that we are to receive him, which means that we are to invite him into our lives. Will you do that? Will you admit your sin, believe that he is able to save you, and then commit

your life into his keeping. When you do that you will learn that he came not merely to save you from the guilt of your sins but also to take charge of your life. Why not hand yourself over to him today? Say, "Lord Jesus Christ, I give myself to you—body, soul, and spirit. I want you to take charge of my life." It is a wise choice, for he is able to keep and bless all those who put their trust in him.

Chapter 76.
The Search

John 6:22-27

Among the most famous sayings of the early church fathers is this one by Saint Augustine:
"Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee." This universal restlessness of the soul is the cause of that apparent search for God that is to be found in most individuals and races. What the saying does not point out is that not every way of seeking him is correct.

The doctrine of prevenient grace means that before someone can seek after God, God must have first of all sought that person. Speaking of man in his natural state, the Bible says "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God" (Rom. 3:10-11). It also says, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). This means that before someone can begin to think even one right thought about God or begin to desire him, God must first have done a work of enlightenment in that person's heart by means of the Holy Spirit. What also needs to be said, however, is that this prevenient and gracious work of the Holy Spirit should have its natural outcome in our thereafter following hard after God. We seek because we already have been found.

But how do we seek God? Do we do it in a way that will inevitably result in our finding him? Or do we seek selfishly and therefore wrongly? The following story will help us to answer that question for our own lives.

Seeking for Jesus

Jesus had crossed the Sea of Galilee by night in order to join the disciples in Capernaum. The people whom he had fed from the five loaves and two fish the day before saw in the morning light that Jesus was no longer in the area in which the miracle had been done. So they began to look for him. Eventually they made their way either around or across the lake and found him at Capernaum.

The reference to the boats in John's story is unclear. Generally commentators interpret the verses to mean that the crowd recalled that there had been but one boat the previous night—the other boats must have been driven in during the night by the storm—and that Jesus had not sailed away with the disciples. However, it also is possible that John means to say that there was only one boat available to Jesus and that he had not entered that. Or again, that only one boat was left on the shore and that Jesus was not in it, nor had he sailed in any of the others. Whatever the meaning of these references, the main point is obviously that the people could imagine no way by which Jesus had crossed the lake, for they could not have imagined that he had walked over it. So when they finally found him they came to him with the question, "Rabbi, how and when did you get here?"

Jesus' reply was to ignore the question and instead deal with the manner of their seeking. He did not praise them. Instead he replied, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him has the Father placed his seal of approval" (vv. 26-27). Here was a sharp unveiling of the crowd's unworthy motives in seeking Jesus. But is it not true that these same motives

operate in our own lives, even at times when we think we are most spiritual?

God or Man?

Let me outline what I mean in slightly more precise terms. First, although the crowd was obviously seeking Jesus in one sense, at the same time it is obvious that the minds of the individuals were on themselves. We see that clearly in the matter of the food, which Jesus mentions. We must remember that the crowd had been hungry when they were with Jesus the night before. He had fed them so that they had had all they wanted. The twelve baskets of leftovers are evidence of the fact that they had been fully satisfied. Still, the night had gone by and now part of the morning. It was time for a late breakfast or lunch; they were hungry again. Obviously their minds were primarily on their stomachs as they sought him.

Do you do that when you seek Jesus? Do you come with your mind filled, not so much with Jesus and his all-surpassing worth, but with your needs or with what you imagine your needs to be?

I am convinced that in our day in American Christianity there is a lamentable tendency to focus on human need rather than on God himself. I am equally convinced that this is the worst possible way to actually have the need met and to achieve a healthy Christianity. I know that someone will say, "But how can that be? Isn't it true that people do have needs?" The answer is: Yes, they do. "And isn't it true that Jesus is the answer to those needs?" The reply is: Yes, he is. "Shouldn't we therefore preach Jesus Christ as the answer to people's needs?" The only proper reply is: Yes, we should. "Well, then, what is wrong?" What is wrong is that it is tragically possible to so focus on our needs that we are actually focusing on ourselves rather than on Jesus, and so never get to the solutions to our problems that Jesus wants to bring. This occurs to different degrees in different people, of course. But I know of one case, a woman who has had a great deal of psychiatric counseling, in which there is no longer even a real desire to get better. She will talk endlessly about her problems. But she will almost come apart psychologically at

any suggestion that God might have an answer that would bring her problems to an end.

Here is another example. I know of a small group Bible study in which the people involved think mainly of their problems. It is a kind of therapy group in which each one listens to the problems of the others so that the others will listen to him. There is almost a competition in problems. Who has the worst problem? Who should get the most sympathy? I do not want to be too harsh at this point, for I believe that it is always good (in a relative way) to get things out in the open. Nevertheless, the solutions are in Christ and not in our ability to articulate problems.

May I say it even more strongly? I am convinced that one of the major steps to achieving good spiritual mental health is getting your mind off yourself entirely and on the Lord instead. The author of an old English classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, was aware of this. He wrote in his volume, "Lift up thine heart unto God with a meek stirring of love; and mean Himself, and none of His goods. And thereto, look thee loath to think on aught but God Himself. So that nought work in thy wit, nor in thy will, but only God Himself. This is the work of the soul that most pleaseth God."

Possessions

There was also a second thing that these people were doing in their search for Jesus and for which they were rebuked. It is related to the first. They had their minds on material things. The point of the miracle —which you will recall from our earlier study of miracles—was to point their minds to Jesus. He had fed them, but they were to see from the miracle that he was that spiritual bread who alone could satisfy the inner spiritual hunger of the soul. Instead they had their minds on material things alone and so missed the greater blessing.

Even before God created man he created a world full of varied and useful things for people to enjoy. These objects were part of God's plan. But it has fallen out since man's rebellion that those gifts that were for

man's happiness today constitute what A. W. Tozer called "a potential source of ruin for the soul." So we find our minds filled with "things" and discover that we often come to God only when our possessions are threatened or when we want more.

It is not at all difficult to find examples of those who, although believers in God and followers of him, nevertheless allow the love of possessions to obscure their awareness of God and limit their growth. Achan is one of whom this was true. He was a soldier in the army of Israel that fought at Jericho. The spoil of that battle was to be dedicated to God, but Achan saw and took for himself a beautiful Babylonian garment, twenty pieces of silver, and a bar of gold. Because of his sin Israel lost her next battle at Ai, and Achan and his family were brought out into the open and judged. Solomon was a wise man in most respects, but he was not wise in regard to wealth and women, both of which ruined his spiritual life. Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Lord about money and were judged for it. Paul wrote of Demas, who "because he loved this world, has deserted me." Unfortunately, this is true to a large degree in our own century.

But is possessing things wrong for a Christian? No, it is not, even though there have been those who have taught this and in some cases teach it today. There is nothing wrong with the right of private property. There is nothing wrong with a Christian's possessing a home, a car, insurance policies, stocks and bonds, even more than one of these things. What is wrong, if there is a wrong in any individual case, is seeking these things to the exclusion of seeking after God, or seeking them more than God.

It is all a question of who or what is in control. I am assuming that you have some possessions. Well, do you control them? Or do they control you? What your attitude should be may be illustrated from a dramatic event in the life of Abraham.

Abraham was a very old man when his son Isaac was born, and as the years went by he undoubtedly came to love Isaac with a great and possessing love. He loved him several times over—because he was the

son of his old age, because he was the son of the promise. Perhaps the time came when this possession— even, let us note, a God-given possession—came dangerously close to overshadowing the place that God alone should have occupied in the aging patriarch's heart. At this point God stepped in with the command, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about" (Gen. 22:2).

The author of the Book of Genesis does not give us the details of the struggle that must have gone on in the heart of this sublime old man that night, but we can imagine what some of them were. How could he kill Isaac, whom he loved? It would be far better were he himself to die in Isaac's place. Besides this, Isaac was the promised son through whom Abraham was to become a great nation and the Messiah was to come. How could God fulfill the promises if Isaac were to die? At last Abraham came to a solution and made up his mind. He would do as God had directed. He would kill Isaac. He would lose him. But he would trust God to raise him up from the dead. This is what the author of Hebrews indicates when he writes that Abraham "offered Isaac as a sacrifice.... even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death" (Heb. 11:17-19).

God let Abraham go through with his plan up to the point where the knife was about to be plunged into the boy. But then he stopped Abraham—it was only a test, God said—and reiterated the promises. How glad Abraham was! He did not have to kill his son! He had him back! But God was glad too, for Abraham would no longer possess Isaac as he had previously. Now God would be all to Abraham.

One commentator writes on this story: "I have said that Abraham possessed nothing. Yet was not this poor man rich? Everything he had owned before was his still to enjoy: sheep, camels, herds, and goods of every sort. He had also his wife and his friends, and best of all he had his son Isaac safe by his side. He had everything, *but he possessed*

nothing. There is the spiritual secret. There is the sweet theology of the heart which can be learned only in the school of renunciation." This writer adds, "The books on systematic theology overlook this, but the wise will understand."

Do *you* understand? It is not our possessions that are wrong but our single-minded possession of our possessions. Do you seek for things? Or do you seek for God? How sad it would be if those things that are destined to perish should keep you from him who is eternal.

Halfhearted Seeking

Finally, there is a third error that characterized this seeking of the Galilean crowd. They came seeking, but they really did not seek wholeheartedly. What happened when Jesus refused to feed them physically the second time? I assume that most of them went home for lunch and are not heard from again in the narrative. Whatever the case, we know that after his speech in the synagogue "many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (v. 66). Do you seek halfheartedly and then get discouraged when your prayer or Bible study is not all you had hoped it would be? Do you lose interest when you find that Jesus wants to lead you in a way that does not at first appeal to you? Or do you press on?

David explained some of his difficulties in Psalm 27. But he declared with determination, "My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!' Your face, LORD, will I seek" (27:8).

What, then, do we have to do to seek God properly and successfully? First, we must seek him where he alone can be found—*in Jesus Christ.* This is the point of Christ's reference to himself in the verse from the story which I cited earlier. Jesus said, "On him [meaning himself] God the Father has placed his seal of approval." What does that mean? In Jesus' day a seal on a document was the equivalent of a signature. It authenticated the document. It was that by which men knew that the document was the real thing and no forgery. It is in much the same sense that God has authenticated Jesus Christ by means of his life,

character, teaching, miracles, and above all by the resurrection from the dead. This is the One in whom God is to be seen and found. Have you come to God in Jesus? He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Second, you must come *yourself.* No one else can come for you, not even a Bible teacher through whom you may even receive great blessing. Do you spend time praying—by yourself? Do you study the Bible? Do you spend time meditating on spiritual things? The Lord Jesus Christ is speaking to individuals when he declares, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20).

Finally, you must come *wholeheartedly.* Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matt. 5:6). He was not speaking of the kind of hunger and thirst we know when he said this. The hunger and thirst we know hardly deserves to be called by that name. He was speaking of the hunger of people who seldom have enough to eat and of that thirst for water without which the thirsting man will die. He was saying that we are to hunger after him as a starving man hungers for bread and to thirst after him as a dying man thirsts after water. Do we do that? If we really would, it is hard to estimate how rich in the knowledge and fruitfulness of God we would be.

Chapter 77.
A Golden Sentence

John 6:28-29

It is a great joy in the study of literature or history to discover a saying that seems to sum up a whole personality or a movement. Caesar supplied us with one of these sayings in his often quoted report on a military encounter in Gaul: "*Veni, vidi, via*" (I came, I saw, I conquered). Winston Churchill did the same in England during the

years of World War II. Who can forget his offer to the British people shortly after war had been declared against Germany? He said that he had not come to offer England an easy time or an easy victory but, rather, "Blood, toil, sweat and tears." Later, after Hitler had failed to break the English spirit through the bombing of London, Churchill joked about Hitler's promise to wring England's neck as if she were a chicken. "Some chicken," said Churchill. Then, after thunderous applause, "Some neck!"

Sentences like these are golden sentences, for they vividly capture a personality, a theme, or a spirited moment of world history. In another sense, however, even such striking statements seem less than totally gripping when placed alongside the truly golden sentences of the Word of God.

What are these sentences? You can think of many of them. John 3:16 —"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Philippians 4:19—"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" Psalm 23:1—"The LORD is my shepherd." I believe that our text, found in the sixth chapter of John, verse 29, is another. The crowd that had witnessed the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish had crossed the Sea of Galilee to find Jesus in Capernaum and had asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" It was a question that many people are asking. It was even a great question, though the answer was greater. Jesus replied in words that every human being on the earth should hear, read, and memorize: "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

Faith or Works

In some ways it is almost unbelievable that the crowd should have asked this question in view of what Jesus had been telling them. He had said, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will *give* to you" (v. 27). Jesus had been speaking of a gift, but they had not grasped his meaning. Instead,

they replied as the natural human mind, which is against God, always does; they replied that they wanted to do something to earn it.

It is always thus. Arthur W. Pink notes in his commentary: "It was thus with the woman at the well: until divine grace completed its work within her, she knew not the 'gift of God' (John 4:10). It was the same with the rich young ruler: 'Good Master, what shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?' (Luke 18:18). It was the same with the stricken Jews on the Day of Pentecost: 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' (Acts 2:37). It was the same with the Philippian jailer: 'Sirs, what must I *do* to be saved?' (Acts 16:30). So it was with the prodigal son—'Make me as one of thy *hired servants*' (one who *works* for what he receives) was his thought (Luke 15:19)." None of those involved in these illustrations knew precisely what they must do or thought they must do, but they were certain that they had to do something.

The human mind is always flattered when it is conscious of doing something for God. What is more, for his doings man considers himself entitled to a reward. How pleased we should all be if we could only earn salvation! In that case we would have succeeded in bringing God into the humbling position of being in debt to us, and we would love it. But this is not the way of salvation.

What is the way? Jesus shows the way in our sentence: "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." It is not what we can do for God but rather what God has already done for us. All that is required of us is that we believe it. The Philippian jailer had asked Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" It was the question of the crowd that had sought Jesus. Paul answered just as Jesus had done before him: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). Jesus is the One whom God has sent into the world to meet our deepest need. "The work of God" is to "believe" on him. What God requires of us is that we give up trying to please him by our own efforts and instead commit ourselves into the hands of our Savior.

Human Works

The burden of this study must obviously be upon what it means to commit oneself into the hands of the Savior. But before dealing with that it is necessary to deal just a bit further with the matter of human works, for it is these much more than the Savior that men would like to trust.

To begin with, someone might well ask the question, "But is it possible to enter heaven without good works?" The answer to the question is no. You cannot enter heaven without good character. But since we are talking about good works or character we must go on to the next question and ask, "But how good must that character be?" The answer is that your works must be without flaw. They must be perfect; you must be perfect. Clearly, nothing less than perfection could satisfy God. But do you have perfect character? Of course not! No one is perfect. Then, where can you get it? The answer is: Only from God. God offers you the perfect character of the Lord Jesus Christ. This will stand to your account just as the money of a rich man would stand to your account were it deposited in your account in your bank. Moreover, God will credit your sins to Jesus, who has died for them. God asks that you believe this, that you accept what Jesus has done.

What are you trusting rather than the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it rites and ceremonies? Some people think that their baptism will save them. But these are signs of what God has already done, not means of salvation. Baptize the devil, if you will, but his end will still be the lake of fire. Some people trust their humanitarian efforts. They give to the United Fund. They help the poor. But these things, while good in themselves, will not satisfy the righteous demands of a holy God in the day of his judgment. Then, what must you do? The answer is that you must do nothing—you can do nothing—except believe on the Lord Jesus.

I realize that no one will ever abandon his or her own attempts at righteousness until convinced that all human efforts are worthless. All must see that they fall short of God's perfect demands. On the other hand, when the worthlessness of human works in the area of satisfying

God is revealed to a person by the Holy Spirit, then, I am convinced, he can lay hold on the Lord Jesus Christ in joy for his salvation.

"Put That on My Account"

I am now going to return to what it means to believe on the Lord Jesus. But I am going to do so by means of a story. It is a story from one of the short books of the Bible—Philemon.

Philemon was a rich man who lived in the city of Colosse. We know that he was rich because it was in his house that the Christians of Colosse were meeting. Besides, he had at least one slave (and probably more). Philemon had been converted through the ministry of Paul, though probably not at Colosse, since there are verses in Paul's letter to the Colossians that indicate that he had never been there. Since Paul had worked for a long time at Ephesus, and Colosse was nearby, it may be that Philemon had met Paul in Ephesus while he was on a business trip. Whatever the case, Philemon returned to Colosse as a Christian.

Time passed, and the day came when one of Philemon's slaves, a man named Onesimus, ran away. There is no evidence that Philemon pursued Onesimus. But this was still a serious matter. The law had been broken. And the law in the matter of a runaway slave (if accused by his master) proscribed death. Moreover, we know from Paul's letter that Onesimus had robbed Philemon before going. On these funds he probably made his way the great distance from Colosse to Rome.

We are told nothing about Onesimus's life in Rome, but few people would doubt that he had a good time, enjoying life to the full. He probably was something like the prodigal son who, we are told, "squandered his wealth on wild living." Onesimus probably did not have a thought for God. He had rejected that when he had turned his back on Philemon. But God had his eye on Onesimus and eventually brought him into contact with Paul, the very man through whom his master had been converted. How did he meet Paul? We do not know. Paul was in prison, so perhaps Onesimus had been arrested and met Paul in prison. God uses rough ways at times in dealing with those who

run from him. But whatever the means, Onesimus met Paul and was converted.

After Onesimus's conversion we can be sure that Paul continued to instruct him in the faith. So I can imagine the day when, under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and in the light of the Word, Onesimus unburdened his conscience. "I need your advice, Paul," he might have said. Then the story came out—the theft, the flight, the loose living, the fear of capture, and now the seemingly impossible task of making right a great wrong. "I feel I ought to go back in accordance with the law and make right what I have done wrong. But I have no money to repay the loss. And returning might even mean my arrest and execution. What should I do?"

Paul replied—in what is surely one of the great examples of the love of Christ within the life of a redeemed sinner—that he would become surety for Onesimus. He would permit Philemon to charge any debt that Onesimus might have incurred to his own account. Moreover, he would write a letter to Philemon that would plead Onesimus's case.

What a picture we have as we imagine Onesimus hurrying back to Colosse with Paul's letter safely tucked into his belt. We can imagine Philemon standing at the gate of his beautiful Roman villa, looking down the road toward the heart of the city. Suddenly he looks up and exclaims, "Why, I believe I see that thief Onesimus coming! Oh, it couldn't be he! He wouldn't have the face to come back here after what he has done! But it does look like him. I'll wait and see." Probably Philemon is reasoning that, if it is Onesimus, it is because the money he stole is all gone and he is going to beg for pardon.

"Master! Master!" Onesimus cries.

"Well, it is Onesimus after all," says Philemon. "I'm surprised that you have the face to be seen around here again."

"Just read this," says Onesimus. He refuses to utter a word in his own behalf.

Philemon takes the letter, breaks the seal, opens the pages, and then slowly begins to read—*Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ.* "Why, this is from Paul!" says Philemon. "Have you seen him, Onesimus?" he asks eagerly of the returning slave.

"Yes, master, in Rome. It was in prison. He led me to Christ."

Philemon reads on—*and Timothy our brother, to Philemon, our dear friend and fellow worker....*
"How like Paul," he was thinking. *And to Apphia our sister.* "Come here, Apphia," Philemon must have called to his wife. "Here is a letter from Paul, from Rome. It seems that he is in prison."

Mrs. Philemon comes running and almost bumps into Onesimus. "Are you back?" she says in some surprise.

"Yes," says her husband, "but don't worry about that now. Onesimus has brought a letter from Paul, and first of all we must read it." *Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.* "He means he was converted," Philemon must have thought. "But I wonder. He would not be the first slave to try to put it over on someone by using religion."

Formerly he was useless to you. "That's an understatement, if ever I heard one."

But now he has become useful both to you and to me. "Perhaps!" *I am sending him... back to you.*

"Well," Philemon must have thought as he read through the letter, "Paul is certainly impressed with Onesimus, but I can hardly see how Onesimus could expect me to be. Not a word here about the robbery! Nothing about the wrongs that he did to me! Paul may believe that he is a Christian, but I will not believe it until the theft is out in the open and Onesimus admits his wrongdoing."

Philemon gets to the end of the letter, however, and there he finds this: *If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self* I suppose that in that moment, Philemon's heart was conquered. He knew what Paul was saying. What is more, he knew that Onesimus had confessed his sin and had returned on Paul's recommendation and with confidence in Paul and in his relationship to Philemon. Paul was becoming surety for Onesimus. Although old and in prison, Paul was offering to pay. Onesimus had trusted him. Who can doubt that at this point Philemon freely forgave Onesimus and received him as he would have received Paul?

A Pageant

The connection between this story, the failure of human works, and the need to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation is obvious. This is a pageant, if we may so understand it.

Philemon is playing the part of God the Father. Paul is Jesus Christ. You and I are Onesimus. What have we done? We have wronged God. We have stolen from him that which is rightly his—honor, worship, glory, obedience—and we have run from him in order to sin our fill. There is no chance of our ever being able to make up that which we owe, and beyond that there is the whole matter of forgiveness and of the good will of the Father.

What shall we do? Shall we trust to good works, moral reformation, ceremonies? None of these things will do. Instead we come to Christ and find him interceding on our behalf. "Father," he says, "this runaway slave has wronged you. He owes what he can never repay. But he believes in me. He has been changed. Therefore, I ask that you charge all that he has done to my account." Do you see that great picture of salvation? Will you come to God on the basis of that great offer of the Lord Jesus Christ? You can run farther, if you will. You can try to escape the consequences of your sin, if you wish—though you will not succeed. Or you can accept the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on your behalf and trust in him as your surety. If you look to yourself you may

well tremble. But as you look to Jesus you will hear that still, quiet voice of the Holy Spirit that speaks comforting words on your behalf:

> Arise, my soul, arise! Shake off thy guilty fears; The bleeding sacrifice in my behalf appears: Before the throne my Surety stands— My name is written on his hands.

On this basis no charge shall ever be raised against you. And you will know that the true work of God is done when you believe on Jesus.

Chapter 78.
"I Am the Bread of Life"

John 6:30-35

In the early years of my ministry, when I was still doing graduate work, I had opportunity to study the Book of Amos in detail. I remember from those studies a passage that gripped me then and that still grips me whenever I remember it. Amos is speaking of a day when God's judgment will be such that there will be no one to preach true doctrine and when men and women will wander up and down and will not be able to find it. He casts the situation under the image of a famine and says, "'The days are coming,' declares the Sovereign LORD, 'when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it'" (Amos 8:11-12).

This is a horrible prophecy. But in some ways it is even more horrible to have the Lord Jesus Christ, the bread of life, available (as he is today) and yet have men refuse to come to him. Men have great hunger—a hunger for truth, righteousness, peace, joy, spiritual satisfaction, and

other things. Jesus is the answer to this hunger. Yet the tragedy is that men will not come to him.

Jesus showed the wisdom of coming when he told the people who had followed him to
Capernaum in Galilee, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (6:35).

Manipulation

Jesus had been talking to people who had been present on the other side of the Sea of Galilee when he had multiplied the loaves and fish. They were interested in having the miracle repeated. They had been taught by their rabbis that when the Messiah would come he would duplicate the miracle of the giving of manna that had been given originally by Moses. Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah. They could see that. Why, then, should they not expect him to duplicate Moses' miracle, particularly that aspect of the miracle that had to do with his repeating it six times a week for the entire forty years of desert wandering?

The Jewish writings said, "You shall not find the manna in this age, but you shall find it in the age that is coming" (Midrash Mekilta on Exod. 16:25). "For whom has the manna been prepared? For the righteous in the age that is coming" (Midrash Tanchuma, *Beshallach* 21:66). "What did the first redeemer do? He brought down the manna. The last redeemer will also bring down manna" (Midrash Rabba on Eccles. 1:9).

No doubt the people had heard such sayings as these and had them in their minds. But as I study the story of this conversation it seems to me more and more that they were far less desirous of that age of messianic blessing than they were of a successful outcome to their efforts to manipulate Jesus into doing what they wanted. Manipulation! That is the real clue to their questions. Jesus had spoken of the fact that he was God's gift to men and that God desired men to believe in him. They replied, in effect, that they would not believe unless they received a sign. We find it hard to imagine how they could overlook the sign they

already had received. But they were actually saying something like this, "We admit, Jesus, that you did a wonderful thing yesterday. But before we believe in you as the Messiah we want to see a real sign. What you did was interesting, but we are Jews and we cannot forget that when Moses fed the people he did so for forty years. We will believe in you if you can do what Moses did and feed us now."

The Lord Jesus Christ does not stoop to answer this type of arrogant question on the part of sinful men. Thus, he simply overlooked the suggestion and instead directed his remarks to the real, spiritual issue. He said two things about Moses. First, Moses did not give manna. God gave it. It was God's miracle. Second, the manna that was given was not the true bread from the true heaven. It was only earthly bread from a visible sky. He then turned away from the person of Moses entirely and instead pointed to himself as that true bread which alone satisfies the real hunger of the human soul.

"I am the bread of life!" This solemn saying is the first of seven such sayings in John's Gospel: "I am the bread of life" (6:35); "I am the light of the world" (8:12; 9:5); "I am the gate" (10:7, 9); "I am the good shepherd" (10:11, 14); "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25); "I am the way and the truth and the life" (14:6); "I am the true vine" (15:1, 5). So we take this first saying, spoken in this significant context, and we look at it for what it teaches about Christ and our condition.

The Message

It is obvious that when the Lord Jesus Christ spoke of himself as the bread, he was using an image about which everybody knew. So we turn to what people knew about bread for his meaning. What is important about bread? The first answer is that bread is *necessary for life.* When I was in the process of preparing this chapter I asked the following question at the dining room table one evening as a number of us were gathered around: "What makes bread important?" This was the answer I received: "Bread is necessary for life." What is more, as we talked about it we saw that in Christ's day bread was even more essential than in our own time, for it was the only staple in most persons' diets.

Without bread, men died. If you see that, then you also see that Jesus was claiming to be the One whom men and women could not do without.

Are you trying to do without him? Are you going your way saying, "I'll take care of myself. I can get by. I live in an affluent age. I have a house, a car, plenty to eat, a good job, a wife, a family. I don't need Jesus"? What if everything in this entire life should go well for you, but you should lose your soul? Would that be a gain? Would you consider it a good bargain to do without Jesus forever?

You cannot do without him. You can manage after a fashion, for a time, but you cannot survive. In another of the "I am" sayings Jesus declared, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (14:6). He is the life. You will remain dead spiritually without him.

Second, bread is *suited for everyone.* Not everyone can eat everything. Some people can never eat sweets. Others cannot eat shellfish. Some cannot eat certain kinds of meat. The nursery rhyme says, "Jack Sprat could eat no fat; his wife could eat no lean." But bread is suited for everyone. In the same way, the Lord Jesus Christ is perfectly suited to the needs of all men. Sometimes people tell me, "Jesus may be all right for the kinds of people you talk to, but he is not for me." That is not at all uncommon. If a person is of more than average intelligence, he tends to think that Christ is only for the dull. If he is dull, he thinks that Christ is only for the intelligent. If he is sophisticated, he thinks that Jesus is only for the common people, and so on. But Jesus is for all. He is for you. He is the Savior of the world, and that includes the peasant as well as the king on his throne. Jesus Christ is great enough and glorious enough so that you will never exhaust him either in this life or in eternity. He has what you need. What is more, he knows you and he knows how to meet that need.

Our Daily Bread

Third, bread *should be eaten daily.* This brings us into a whole new area, the area of the Christian life. Everything before this has had to do with trusting Christ initially. But when a person trusts Christ as Savior this is hardly the end. Actually, it is the beginning, for it brings him into a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ in which he is to grow by feeding upon him day by day.

This point puts us in mind of that phrase in the Lord's Prayer that says, "Give us today our daily bread." There is a great emphasis upon the words "today" or "daily" in this prayer simply because by means of them the idea of a repeated fulfillment of a request occurs twice. The Lord's Prayer has only sixty-five words (seventy-two in Greek). So anything that is repeated twice is important.

But why is it important? For many years commentators on this prayer simply did not know the exact meaning of the Greek word that is translated "daily," for this is the only place where it occurs. They had a rough idea. The word is translated in our Bibles. Still, no one could be quite certain what precise shade of meaning to give to it. In fairly recent times, however, scholars have discovered a piece of Egyptian papyrus that seems to contain most of this word. It is part of an account book and contains the reading: "_ *obol* for *epious*—." The writing breaks off at this point. But the word *epious* seems to be the Greek word *epiousios* (daily) minus the last three letters. The reference seems to be to something like a daily ration.

Interestingly enough, this meaning now seems to be supported by a seemingly parallel inscription in Latin found at Pompeii. This, too, is a list of expenditures, and it contains the phrase "five assess for *diaria*" (a term based on the Latin word for "day"). Since both these phrases seem to be part of lists itemizing what we would call a day's supply of something for a person or group of persons, it seems right to take both words in the same sense and refer them to rations.

Put these two texts together—"Give us today our daily bread" and "I am the bread of life"—and think of the truths that emerge from them. One truth is that God cares for our bodies. The Lord's Prayer is certainly

speaking of this. Unfortunately, there always have been some in the Christian church who have tried to minimize the importance of the body on the mistaken conviction that by doing so they were somehow becoming more spiritual. But that is not right. Christianity is the only religion in the world that takes the body with full seriousness. It teaches that God gave the body as well as the soul, and that a redemption of the body as well as a redemption of the soul is part of the divine plan. Therefore, it is right to pray for this world's needs, for food, homes, clothing, and other necessities. We have an illustration of the Lord's concern for physical needs in the fact that he fed the multitude.

On the other hand, there is also the truth that God is able and willing to provide for our spiritual needs, and this is far more important. We have spiritual needs as well as physical needs, though in our fallen state we may not be so conscious of them. Will we allow Jesus to satisfy those needs also? All we need to do is come to him, and come daily.

Tragically, many Christians allow the love of things to intrude between themselves and Jesus and, therefore, go on being spiritually hungry. In the Old Testament we are told that this happened repeatedly with the people of Israel. We are told that they desired things instead of God. Therefore, God gave them "things" but "sent a wasting disease upon them" (Ps. 106:15). We do the same thing today. One of our hymns describes us in the terms of God's description of the Jewish people in Old Testament times—"rich in things, but poor in soul." Is that your condition? Perhaps you have devoted most of your life to satisfying your hunger for objects, and yet you have never looked to God in order to be fed spiritually. You pray, "Give me my physical needs." But you have never made a habit of praying, "Give me that spiritual bread that comes down from heaven."

Most of our hungers are all right in themselves, of course, although we often get them out of proportion. They have been put within us by God. We have a valid desire for achievement, happiness, friendship, love, and success. But it is tragic that many Christians attempt to satisfy these hungers in the world's way while neglecting the truly satisfying task of spending time with God.

Fourth, bread also *produces growth.* We need to grow. The church of Jesus Christ is weak in our age, and it is weak simply because the individuals who compose it are not strong. Where are the great churches of a former age, churches filled with men and women who knew the great doctrines of the faith and were not afraid to trumpet them to a sleeping world? Where are the Augustines, the Luthers, the Calvins, and the Wesleys of our time? I do see some hopeful signs. The fact that some conservative churches are growing is hopeful. The Jesus movement is another hopeful sign. So are the great evangelistic crusades. But we do not have a strong church today. What we have is a weak, anemic Christianity, a lot of easy believism coupled with morality—

and I include evangelical churches in that characterization. What is the reason for our sickly Christian postures? Undoubtedly, the reason is our deep failure to feed upon Jesus Christ who alone can make us grow.

The True Bread

Would you like to see such growth—in your church, in you personally? If so, you must feed on Jesus. This means, in the first place, that you must not look to other people as the source of your nourishment. That is what the people who had been talking to Jesus were doing. They were looking to the current teaching of their rabbis and to Moses. They were saying, "We are people of tradition. We look to what has been passed on to us by Moses through history." Do not look to the past. Do not look to men as the source of your teaching. I know that others can be the channels of good teaching. I am trying to be that myself for many people. But it would be terrible if a person should go away from hearing sound teaching and say, "But Dr. So and So said..." when you should go out declaring, "The Lord Jesus Christ has spoken thus." There is no power in the name of a human teacher. But there is power in that blessed name of Jesus, that name that is above all earthly names. Before him, every head shall bow and all knees bend.

In the second place, we must not look to earthly things for our satisfaction. The people of Christ's day were doing this. Are you

looking only for your earthly needs to be granted? God will satisfy your earthly needs. He has promised to do it. But if that is the whole of your desire, even your major desire, then you are never going to see a great moving of the Holy Spirit of God in your life. We need to get our minds off ourselves and our needs, and we need to focus instead on the Lord Jesus Christ and his glory. And what great glory! What a great Lord!

Have you ever thought about all that grain must pass through before it becomes bread? It must first be planted and then grow. When it is ripe it must be cut down, winnowed, ground into flour. Finally, it must be subjected to the fiery heat of the oven. Only by this process does it become able to sustain life. This is what happened to the Lord Jesus Christ in order that he might become your bread. He was born into this world. He was bruised. He was cut down by sinful men. He passed through the fires of God's holy wrath as he took your place in judgment. This is his glory. He suffered this for you. How, then, can you refuse to feed upon him? Come to him! Draw from his fullness, and grow strong.

Chapter 79.
Those Who Shall Come

John 6:36-37

In considering Jesus as the bread of life, it was pointed out in the last study that today's churches have not fed adequately upon that bread. The result is a sick and anemic Christianity in our century. If the verses to which we come now are understood and are allowed to penetrate the heart, they will cause the Christian who feeds upon them to be sickly no longer; instead, that person will grow and become strong. These are difficult verses—this section of John's Gospel may be among the most difficult portions of the book to assimilate—yet they are verses that carry us deep into the mind and heart of God.

These verses are given to fix our minds upon the grace and sovereignty of God in all things. They therefore take confidence away from

anything that might be found in man and, instead, anchor it in God alone who alone is able to support it. They teach of man's sin and inability, God's electing and irresistible grace, the free offer of the gospel, and God's keeping power on behalf of his saints.

Another way of saying the same thing is to say that these few verses carry us deep into the principles of the Reformed or Calvinistic faith, although of course they do not date alone from the Reformation. This is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, Paul, Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Bullinger, Bucer, and other outstanding leaders of the Reformation period. These doctrines are reflected in many of our creeds, which in turn have become the official standards of many Protestant denominations. The official documents of the various branches of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches in Europe and America are all explicitly Calvinistic. The Baptist and
Congregational churches, although they have no fixed creeds, have in many cases been strongly Reformed if we may judge from the writings of their major preachers and theologians. The Church of England and her daughter church, the Episcopal Church of America, have a Reformed creed in the Thirty-nine Articles. Moreover, even in Methodism (which is generally opposed to this system of doctrine) there is a body of Whitefield Methodists in Wales that even today bear the name of "Calvinistic Methodists."

In more recent times Hodge, Dabney, Cunningham, Smith, Shedd, Warfield, Kuyper, Spurgeon, and Berkouwer have all held these doctrines and taught them with conviction. In many cases they were taught under the acrostic of the "Tulip," which stands for: "total depravity," "unconditional election," "limited atonement," "irresistible grace," and "the perseverance of the saints."
These doctrines lie embedded in this section of John 6. And since they are so important, we are going to look initially only at the first two verses (vv. 36 and 37) where we find three great teachings: (1) man's inability, (2) election, and (3) the free offer of God's grace. After this we will return to the verses a second and a third time for a deeper study of these teachings.

Man's Inability

The first principle is the principle of man's total spiritual inability. It is taught in verse 36, in which Jesus says of those who had followed him from the far side of the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum, "But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe." This is more than a mere description of the situation, for several verses later Jesus adds in speaking to the same people: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (v. 44). In other words, the people *did not* believe because they *could not* believe, and because of this, Jesus was not in the least surprised by their attitude. They had witnessed all the evidence for Christ's claims that a person could wish. They had seen him, heard him. But they could not believe.

We must be careful as we say this to point out that the inability of man in spiritual things is not a physical inability and, therefore, that a man is not excused by his failings. He is guilty for his inability to believe. Let me explain in this way. Suppose that a man could be saved by literally getting up and walking over to Jesus. That would be easy to do if the man were in good health. But suppose he were lame. In that case, walking over to Jesus would be impossible; and because the inability was physical no one would blame the lame man. The same thing would be true if man's inability was analogous to physical blindness. We could say, "Look to Jesus and be saved." But if a man were blind, he could not look and no one would hold him guilty for that inability.

When we say, then, that the natural man has no ability in himself to turn to Jesus we are not speaking of a physical failing. We are speaking of something deeper, something that delves deep into man's nature, and for which he *is* guilty. A partial illustration can be found in the nature of animals. In the animal kingdom there are animals that eat nothing but meat—carnivores. There are animals that will eat only grass or plants—herbivores. Take a lion, which is a carnivore, and place a beautiful dish of oats or a bale of hay before him. Will he eat the oats or the hay? No! Why not? Is it not physically possible for the lion to eat oats? The answer is yes; it is physically possible for the lion to eat oats. But it is not in his nature to do so. Consequently, he will not eat them. In the

same way, it is physically possible for a lamb to eat meat. But a lamb will not eat meat. So it is possible to say, in the same sense in which we are using the word of human inability, that it cannot.

In speaking of the will we come even closer to the true nature of man's problem. For the full tragedy of man's situation apart from God's grace is that man will not admit his need and will not come to the Lord Jesus Christ to have that need met. Moreover, since the will more than any other part of man's makeup is the real man, this means that man is totally depraved in spiritual things. Or, as we might also say, he is depraved at the very core of his being.

Those well-known verses from Romans 3 must be seen in this light. They say: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God" (vv. 10-11). Here are verses that express man's total inability to find or please God—in the area of the moral life ("there is no one righteous"), in the intellectual realm ("there is no one who understands"), and in the sphere of the will ("there is no one who seeks God"). Moreover, it is this combination that makes the case of man so desperate. Someone who does not hold to Reformed doctrine might say, "But surely the Bible teaches that anyone who will may come?" Of course! But that is not the point. On that we are all agreed. Certainly, anyone who will may come. But who wills to come? The answer is: No one except those in whom the Holy Spirit has already performed the entirely irresistible work of the new birth so that, as the result of the miracle, the spiritually blind eyes of the natural man are opened to see God's truth and the totally depraved will of the sinner is turned about to enable him to embrace Jesus Christ as his Savior.

When you as a sinner begin to understand this, when you begin to understand something of your nature and the absolute necessity for God's electing grace, then and only then do you begin to see how desperate your situation actually is. If you are holding onto the belief that you have some ability in spiritual things, no matter how small, then there is no great need to worry. Life is long. You can make yourself believe in the Lord Jesus Christ later, even on your deathbed, if necessary. At least you can take your chances on that being possible.

But if you realize that the Bible is completely accurate and serious when it says that you are dead in trespasses and sins, that you cannot come to Christ apart from a miracle, the working of which is entirely in the sovereign choice of God, then you find yourself close to despair. For how can you be saved if it is neither in your nature nor power to trust in God and in the work of the Lord Jesus? You cannot. You have no hope; no hope, that is, unless God intervenes, in spite of yourself and your desires, to save you by pure grace.

Election

That, of course, brings us to the next verse. For if verse 36 says, as it does, that left to himself man is totally unable to believe on Jesus Christ or come to God, it is also equally and gloriously true that God does not leave all men to themselves but rather acts, in spite of man's will, to save some. So verse 37 declares: "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." It is because of this truth (and this truth alone) that Christians are able to preach and testify to Christ's gospel.

We need to enter into this sentence by looking into each of its parts. First, it speaks of the original position of all things, saying that all are in God's hands. This must be so if God is able to give some of those who are in his hands to Jesus.

I know that as we read this in the understanding of the flesh we are inclined to believe it is wrong. We like to think that we are each in our own hands so that we can each go in any direction we choose. However, that is not true. Within a certain limited sphere of activity it is true that you and I make our own decisions. But in this verse God is telling us the far greater truth, that we are held in God's hands in relation to everything important, whether we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ or not. What is to be our fate, then, if we are not among those given by God the Father to the Lord Jesus Christ as his inheritance and for whom he died? Jonathan Edwards knew the answer to that question, and he presented it so graphically to those who heard him that men and women trembled in the pews and called out in desperation to God for salvation.

"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" was his message. Terrible was the plight of those who spurned the Son but who could never escape the justified wrath of the Father! "There is no other reason to be given, why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God's hand has held you up," he argued. "You need to consider yourselves, and awake thoroughly out of sleep."

That is true. All you have and are—your health, wealth, mind, aspirations, even your very life— you have and are because God holds you. You would like to think that you are your own master, the captain of your own fate, but you are not. What happens to you is solely in God's pleasure.

But then, second, this verse also speaks of a great transaction, according to which some of those who have been held in God's hand in his suspended wrath have been handed over to the Lord Jesus Christ in his mercy. That is the greatest contract of all time, and this is not the only place in the Bible where this truth is mentioned. For instance, in the seventeenth chapter of John, Jesus speaks of those whom the Father has given him. In verse 2 he says, "For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to *all those you have given him."* In verse 6 it is mentioned twice: "I have revealed you to *those you gave me* out of the world. They were yours; *you gave them to me* and they have obeyed your word." Verse 9 says, "I am not praying for the world, but for *those you have given me."* And in verse 24 Christ says, "Father, I want *those you have given me* be with me where I am, and to see my glory."

Who are these who have been given by God the Father to Jesus Christ? They are those about whom Paul writes in Ephesians: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). These are the elect. We are told elsewhere that they are to form a vast and innumerable company.

Third, our text teaches that this great transaction that took place in eternity past between the Father and the Son is to be followed up by many specific changes in time. This is seen in the text in the contrasts

between the tenses of the major verbs. In verse 37 where the Son is waiting for those whom the Father has given, the change is from the present tense to the future—"all that the Father *gives*" and "*will come*." In verse 39, where the matter is looked at from the perspective of the eternal will of God, the change is from the past tense to the present —"of all that he *has given* me." In other words, the choice of God in eternity past has this effect—that men and women come to Christ now in time, coming as sinners who need to be saved, coming with nothing in order that they might receive everything from Christ.

It is in order to have men and women come in this way that the gospel is preached. It is why I preach it today. Will you come? Will you believe in Jesus? Do not say, as some do, "But if I am not among those whom God has given to Jesus, I cannot come." That is true. But you do not know whether you are among that number or not. All you know is that the gospel is proclaimed to you and that the command is given: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." Will you come? I know that there are difficulties in sorting this out intellectually. But the text need not be a problem for you. It can be a blessed comfort. For if God has given certain persons to his Son—if this is irrevocably determined—why should you not be among them?

Finally, some should also be encouraged by the fourth point, which tells us that there is no exception in what is described here. For *all* that the Father has given to Jesus *shall* come. That is an encouragement even to the preacher of the gospel. There are periods in history when the gospel message seems to fall almost entirely on stony soil and little fruit is forthcoming. At other times the soil is receptive and much happens. What if the preacher, teacher, or lay evangelist were to peg his sense of accomplishment to these results? Well, it might be all right in periods of great blessing. But in times of drought how discouraged he would be! If, on the other hand, he is to take this text at full force, realizing that God is serious when he proclaims that *all* whom he has chosen shall come, then he can preach with full confidence and can rejoice to be a part of God's great plan of salvation.

Take heart, Christian worker! I do not know why God has chosen to save some through the foolishness of preaching and witnessing, but he has. Moreover, he has promised that all whom he has chosen to save will come. Nothing can stop them—not your failures (though you must take heed as to how you live), not even the devil! You may seem to be sowing seed at random and at times with little results. But God will see to it that some of that seed falls onto ground that he has prepared, and that it prospers. "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

The Free Offer of God's Grace

Finally, although it would be quite natural to stop at this point, it would not be right to stop without saying once more that none of these teachings is given to limit in any way the free offer of God's grace through the gospel. This is the offer of the second half of verse 37. In this study we have looked at John 6:36 and the first half of John 6:37. We are going to be looking at the second half of verse 37 in detail later, but even here it is not right to omit it. This half says, "And whoever comes to me I will never drive away." What a great offer that is! What a great promise! It is universal. It has no restrictions. It tells us that anyone is welcome to come in any way at any time. You can be young or old, bold or timid. You may have heard the gospel for the first time today or have been acquainted with it for the better part of a long lifetime. None of this matters. The only thing that matters is whether or not you will come to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior.

Someone will say, "But what must I do?" The answer is: You must stop doing. You have done quite enough for one lifetime, for you have ruined yourself by your doing. Your question should not be, "What should *I do?"* but rather, "What has *he done?"* The answer to that question is simply that it has all been done. He died for you. The work is finished. You need only to let go of your own attempts to earn God's favor and fall instead into the gentle and waiting arms of the Savior.

Chapter 80.
The Certainty of Divine Grace

John 6:37

John 6:37 demands discussion of a point passed over briefly in the last study. It is found in the first half of the verse, the half that reads, "All that the Father gives me will come to me." This is one of the great statements in the Bible of the doctrine of "the efficacious calling" of the sinner by God, or "irresistible grace." It is the teaching that all those whom God has chosen inevitably come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This means that God's grace will not be frustrated, that the plan of salvation will come to a perfect completion, and that Jesus Christ will not have died in vain. This teaching necessarily belongs with those looked at earlier, for it is part and parcel of that Reformed system of doctrine that holds to the biblical teaching on man's total spiritual depravity and the necessity of God's electing grace.

Moreover, a little thought will show anyone who is willing to face these questions fairly that it must be this way. If we should attempt to make salvation ultimately dependent upon some act of man, no matter how small that act is, then nothing can be certain where salvation is concerned, and a statement like this—"All that the Father gives me will come to me"—is impossible.

Alpha and Omega

Let me explain what I mean. If Jesus Christ died not knowing if men would believe in him or not, and without the guarantee by God that they would believe, then it is entirely possible that no one would have believed and that his death would have been for nothing. He would have died, but no one would have been saved. You cannot have it both ways. Thus, God either determines who will be saved and sees to it that they are saved, or there is at least the possibility that no one will believe in Jesus. And if there is the possibility that no one will believe, or even

that some whom God has chosen and given to Jesus will not believe, then John 6:37 is untrue and ought not to appear in the Bible.

Some have tried to avoid this conclusion by introducing the factor of God's foreknowledge. They argue that God in his omniscience foresaw that some would believe and therefore sent Jesus Christ to die for them. But that does not help anyone out of the difficulty. In fact, it makes the difficulty worse. For, instead of making the salvation of an individual depend upon the depraved will of man, it actually makes even the death of Jesus Christ himself depend upon the will of man. For if God had foreseen that none would believe, then Jesus would not have come and died and the great drama of salvation would have been nipped in the bud—and all because of us! We would have been dictating to the Savior.

Instead of this reasoning, we must come back to the great biblical principle that God is not only the author of salvation in the sense of being the One out of whom the plan flows, but also the author in the sense that, like any good author, he finishes the story. Thus, God brings the plan of salvation to its perfect conclusion by irresistibly drawing men, women, and children to himself. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the author and the finisher of our faith. Moreover, this is precisely what John 6:37 is teaching.

Cords of Love

As I say this, however, I am aware that there has been some disagreement even among Reformed theologians, as to how God does this. There have been various theories. Everyone is agreed that if God is drawing men and women to himself irresistibly, he is nevertheless not coercing them.
He is not forcing or manipulating men. The Bible says that he draws us with the cords of love. But how does he do this? That is the question.

One of the theories advanced to answer this question is that God so orders circumstances that by ordering them he leads the will to do what he desires. What are we to say to this theory? Certainly, we may say

that on a human level this often is true. We see it, for instance, in the raising of our children. I did this with my two-year-old daughter. We were at church for a supper meeting at which the children were to eat together while the adults began their meeting. My daughter did not want to eat. In fact, she would not! I sat down at the children's table, telling her that I was tired—which I was. When she would not eat, I asked for a plate for myself and had it piled high with lots of red Jell-O. I took the first bite. It was all I ate, but as I ate it I remarked how good it was. I took another spoonful, but as I took it I passed it by her nose. Her mouth opened, and the Jell-O was gone. "You ate my Jell-O," I exclaimed. That was a good joke to her. She brightened up, and soon she was eating it all. In a few minutes she pointed to the meat. She wanted some of that. She drank some milk. Finally, she had not only finished dinner, she had even had seconds and thirds on the Jell-O. That is bending the will toward its own best interests through circumstances.

The difficulty with this theory is that it does not do justice to what the Bible has to say about the will as it is since the fall of man into sin. Before the fall this theory would have been operative. But since the fall, it is not. Here we must remind ourselves about the character of people's inability to choose God. Our inability is not physical; it lies deep in our nature. We will not believe. But this lies so deep in our nature that for all practical purposes the "will not" actually means "cannot." This is why the Bible speaks of man as being "dead in trespasses and sins." He is as unable to save himself as a dead man is unable to return himself to life. Therefore, no matter how propitious the circumstances may be, the answer is always the same. It is to reject Jesus.

Rebirth

What would it take for a dead man to respond physically to the voice of Jesus? The answer is that it would take something like a resurrection, a miracle. That was true in the case of Lazarus. Lazarus had been dead four days. Jesus called, and Lazarus came forth. Why? Because Jesus did a miracle in raising him to life. In the same way it requires

something like that miracle if a man or woman who has been dead in sin is to believe on Jesus.

This is what the Bible teaches. Therefore, a second, better theory is that God calls people to himself irresistibly by means of a miracle. It can be described as a resurrection. More often it is described as rebirth. Have you never heard someone say that the birth of a baby is a miracle? Of course you have, and it is. It is this same miracle that God does spiritually in the life of anyone who comes to believe in Jesus. The order is this: (1) God chooses, (2) God regenerates, (3) the individual believes. Moreover, it is because God alone is active in the first two steps that the calling of God is 100 percent effective. Here are some verses that teach this.

First, James 1:18: "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created." This verse speaks of the moment at which the Christian life begins as the moment at which a child is conceived. It is telling us that this is done according to the will of the Father and not of the child. Who ever heard of a baby deciding on the time or place where it should be born? The idea is preposterous! Yet it is no more preposterous than the teaching that you and I become children of God by deciding that we would like to be born into God's family. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, it is because the matter of your faith in Christ was decided first of all by your heavenly Father. He engendered you. Moreover, we are told that the means by which he did that was the Word of God, the Bible.

The second important verse to tell about our spiritual conception and birth is John 1:13. This verse tells us that those who are born again are born "not of natural descent [blood], nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." This teaches that there are three ways by which a man or a woman does *not* become God's child. It is not by physical birth. This is the significance of the phrase "not of blood." We do not associate birth with blood today, except in the phrases "noble blood" or "blue blood," but blood was associated with birth in antiquity; this is the sense in which John is writing. No one becomes a child of God simply because his or her parents are children of God. No one

inherits the relationship. Then, too, no one becomes a child of God through emotion. This is the heart of the phrase "nor of human decision." A person can be moved to tears in a revival service, for example, and still not be born again. Finally, it is not of his own will either; for, according to John, no one becomes a believer merely by sitting down and deciding entirely in himself that he or she will believe. We cannot do that. Well, then, how do we come to believe? The answer is that we come to believe simply because God first does a miracle in order to make us alive spiritually.

A person must believe. You must accept Jesus if you are to be saved. But the question is: Why do you accept him when another person does not? Or, why do you reject him when another comes to him? Is it anything in man? Of course not! If that were the case, there could be boasting in heaven. Salvation is not of man, salvation is of God who intervenes. Men believe because God has first regenerated them, rather than it being the other way around.

Birth from Above

A third important verse on this subject is John 3:3: "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." In one sense this verse merely repeats what I have been saying. It tells us that a person must experience spiritual birth if he or she is to see spiritual things (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14). But it is also true that it adds a bit more. For one thing, there is a choice of words in the expression "born again" that is a clue to the fuller meaning. There are two words for "again" in the Greek language. One word is *palin*, which refers only to the repetition of an act. This is not the word used. The other word is *anothen*, which means both "from above" and "again." Clearly, by using this word, John expressed the idea that the new birth must come from God alone and not from man.

Moreover, even the idea of repetition ("again") is not mere repetition. For *anothen* also means to have the act repeated by the same one who acted the first time. In other words, just as God made Adam alive once by breathing into him the divine breath so that he became a living soul, so it is necessary for God to breathe into a man the second time in order

that he might be brought to life spiritually. It is hard to miss the fact that this is precisely what is involved in the quickening of a dead soul, for a few verses farther on Jesus speaks of the fact that the new birth takes place by means of God's breath or spirit. He says, "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and of the Spirit" (3:5). God's spirit is his breath. His breath must fill our spiritual dust if it is to be animated.

The last verse is 1 Peter 1:23: "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." There are many images for the Bible in the Word of God. The Bible calls itself a lamp to our feet, a light to our path. It is a hammer, a rock, a mirror, a sword. It is milk for the infant. It is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. These are all great and good images, but none is so bold or striking as the image for the Word of God that occurs in this verse from 1 Peter. Here it is sperm, the male life germ. Peter is saying that God uses his Word to engender spiritual life in an individual, just as the human father implants his life within a woman in the act of engendering a child.

What happens when a man or a woman is born again? First, God takes the ovum of saving faith and gives it to the individual; for we are told that even faith is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). Next, he sends forth the seed of his Word so that the living Word pierces the egg of faith and engenders life. In this act a new spiritual life comes into being. And if anyone should inquire after the mother, the answer is that the church fulfills this function. For it is within the womb of the church that the Word is preached and in which the embryo can grow until it comes to the point at which the new life becomes visible and the cry of confession announces the reality of new birth.

It Matters

If you are a Christian, this is a great truth for you, for it is a truth that gives tremendous importance to what you become in Christ and to what you do. God has a plan. So if he has chosen you and called you to

himself in the course of his day-by-day unfolding of that plan, then where you are and what you do where you are matters.

Here is an illustration. According to any system of theology that places the ultimate decision in salvation with human beings, salvation is something like getting on a train that takes you away from your environment. It comes from somewhere else, passes through your town, and goes on to glory. Grace is involved, of course. God did not have to send the train. But still, your efforts are involved. You have to get on, and it takes you away. What I have been teaching is different. According to this system, you are not even on the platform. You are at home. But God comes on the train; he gets off; he goes to your house; he does a miracle in your life. And then, he instructs you to live for him there, because that is important to him.

If you see that, you will realize that the most important thing in this entire universe is, not what is happening in the halls of our heads of state or in the laboratories of the world's most brilliant scientists, but what is happening in you now. This gives importance to whatever you do. It means, you matter.

Are you saying, "But I am far too insignificant; I am not important"? In the world's eyes, yes, that may be true. But it is not true for God. In Shakespeare's *King Lear* there is a dungeon scene in which a number of selfish nobles are about to put out the eyes of an old man named Glouster. It is a wicked deed, and they are doing it for their own selfish ends. On the stage with them is an exceedingly minor character in the play. He does not even have a name. In the list of *dramatis personae* he is just called a servant. No one has been paying any attention to him. Nevertheless, in this one scene he rushes across the stage to defend Glouster. At once one of the nobles turns about and simply cuts him down with his sword. Then they go on and blind the old man anyway. Who is important in this scene? The world answers, "the noble." But if this were real life and we were looking at the play from God's perspective, the right answer would be, "the servant." For he did the right thing at the right moment.

We do not see this great drama of life clearly. God is the only One who knows the end from the beginning. We do not know the importance of our role, but we do know that he has created us and called us so that at this particular moment in the drama, in the play called "Time," we might take the part he has given in a way that is honoring to Jesus Christ. Will you take that role? Will you live for him? This is the spiritual meat of the text that tells us that all whom the Father has given to Jesus shall come to him and that no one who comes will be cast out.

Chapter 81.
No One Driven Away

John 6:37

The record of John 6:37 is one of the great texts of the Word of God: "whoever comes to me I will never drive away." This verse swings the broad gates of heaven wide open and promises that Jesus will receive all who come to the Father by him. It means that the gospel is for you if you will hear it and come to Christ. It is for you personally.

Years ago in the Midwest there was an old German farmer by the name of Klein. He was an ungodly man. Although he lived across the street from an Evangelical Lutheran Church, he never went in; and, of course, he did not believe the gospel. To his way of thinking, the gospel was for other people, not for him. One day, however, the Bible school of the church began to teach the Bible school children the chorus of the hymn that goes:

> Grace! Tis a charming sound,
> Harmonious to the ear;
> Heav'n with the echo shall resound,
> And all the earth shall hear.
> Saved by grace alone!
> This is all my plea: Jesus died for all mankind,

And Jesus died for me.

From his listening post across the street Mr. Klein heard the children sing. He heard most of the words clearly. But when they came to the line "Jesus died for all mankind," he thought they were singing "Jesus died for old man Klein, and Jesus died for me." The thought that Jesus died for him personally finally sank into his heart. Klein crossed the street to the church, attended services, and eventually committed his life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is the message of John 6:37. Put your name in that song and say, "Jesus died for Mary Jones, John Smith, Paul Brown, Betty Harris, or whatever your name might be." Jesus died for you if you will come to him.

Belief and Trust

Before we go on to see just how wide this text is—how wide heaven's gates are flung open by it—we need to explain, first of all, what is meant by the word "come." Jesus said, "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." What does it mean to come to him? One answer to that question is that Jesus is clearly talking about faith. To come to Jesus means to have faith in him. This channel of salvation is always spoken of in the Bible. "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith," Paul wrote to the Ephesians (Eph. 2:8). "Without faith it is impossible to please God," said the author of Hebrews (11:6). Faith in Jesus is commitment to Jesus based upon a belief that he is who he said he is and that he will do what he has promised to do for everyone who trusts him.

The great Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon once wrote about faith: "Faith is not a blind thing; for faith begins with knowledge. It is not a speculative thing; for faith believes facts of which it is sure. It is not an unpractical, dreamy thing; for faith trusts, and stakes its destiny upon the truth of revelation.... Faith is believing that Christ is what He is said to be, and that He will do what He has promised to do, and then to expect this of Him." Since Jesus said that he was dying for the sin of mankind and that he would save any who would commit themselves to

him, saving faith is therefore just believing this and putting your life into the hands of the Savior.

Look at the same thing another way. What is faith? Faith is a simple thing. It is the eye that looks to Jesus, just as the eyes of the Israelites looked to the bronze serpent in the wilderness and were healed. Faith is the hand that grasps, just as Jacob grasped hold of the angel of the Lord, who wrestled with him by the brook Jabbok, and would not let go until he had been blessed. Faith is the mouth that feeds upon Christ, feasting on the bread of life and quenching its thirst with living water. Again, faith is clinging to Christ when it seems that this is all one can do. Faith is building on Christ so that a worthwhile structure begins to grow on that foundation. Faith is stepping out by faith in Christ when there seems to be nothing to step on, just as Peter stepped out onto the waters of the Sea of Galilee at Christ's bidding. Faith is trusting Christ and proving his promises.

Sometime ago a man introduced himself to me with the remark that he was a "C and E" Christian. I did not know what he was going to say, but I sensed what was coming.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Christmas and Easter," he answered. "I am the kind of Christian who goes to church on Christmas and Easter." I could easily have insulted him, but I held back and instead reminded myself of another Christian, an old saint from England, who called herself a "T and P" Christian. She wrote these letters in her Bible opposite promises that she personally had found to be true. The letters stood for "tried and proven."

Which are you? Are you a "C and E" Christian? In most cases that is no Christian at all. Or are you a "T and P" Christian, one who has tried God's promises by faith and has proved them personally?

I feel at this point that someone may say, "But I do not think that I can do even one of these things. I want to look up to Christ, but I cannot look. I want to grasp hold, but I cannot seem to do it. I want to feed on him, but I seem to lack the will even for that. I cannot seem to cling,

build, step out, or prove his promises." But can you not simply let go then and fall into the waiting arms of Jesus? Suppose there is a fire and you are trapped on the third-story ledge of a building. The building is burning down around you and will soon fall. You are clinging to the ledge for dear life. Below are the firemen with their net. Well, can you not let go and fall into the net that will save you? That is all God asks. Merely release your hold on all that keeps you from him—whether this is your desire to run your own life, your own fine opinion of yourself, your low opinion of yourself, your good works, whatever it is—and fall into the net of salvation, into the waiting arms of the Savior. Jesus said, "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away."

Who May Come?

Let me make it even more personal. Who, according to this text, may come to Jesus? The answer is: anyone. How may they come? The answer is: in anyway. When may they come? The answer is: at any time. How can it be more universal? The first half of verse 37 is written in the abstract—"*All* that the Father gives me will come to me." This is the part of Christ's sentence that deals with election. It is plural, designating a great number. It is abstract, for we do not know who those who are called by God are. The second half of the verse, however, our half, is both singular in number and personal—"him." It is Jesus' way of saying "You," whoever you may be, and however and whenever you may come.

Even if you are a great sinner, you may come. The Bible tells us that Jesus did not come to call the righteous "but sinners to repentance." What is your sin? Murder? Adultery? Theft? It does not matter. If you will come to Jesus, you will be received. "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." Children of Christian parents, you who have been running away from the God of your father and mother, you may come! "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." Backslider! "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." You who are indifferent! "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away."

Some time ago I met a man who was indifferent toward Jesus Christ. He told me that he came to Tenth Presbyterian Church occasionally, adding that this was "whenever my friends think I need a dose of religion." That kind of exposure to religion will innoculate you against true faith and will lead you (with a false sense of wellbeing) to a Christless eternity. Religion saves no one. Christ saves. So Christ is for you if you are indifferent. Come to him. Jesus said, "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away."

How May I Come?

Then, too, I want you to see that there is no restriction on how a person may come, just as there is no restriction on who may come. How may you come? The answer is: in any way.

Some come running. I have seen that many times. The gospel is preached; these persons respond like Zacchaeus, who climbed a tree to get a saving view of Christ, or like Peter, who jumped vigorously into the sea and swam toward him. For these persons, the gospel is like a key in a lock, or a quarter in a soft-drink machine. The results are immediate. Moreover, they seem to come in the fullness of faith into a full knowledge of the gospel. Often, Catholics who have not believed in Christ personally come in this way, for they often have a true sense of God's sovereignty, righteousness, wisdom, and other attributes to begin with, and the gospel makes all of it fall into place.

Others come limping to Christ with poor, halting steps. They want to believe; they think they believe, a bit, in part; then they are not too sure, on the other hand, that they do want to come. It makes no difference. These may come too, for the words of Jesus do not specify how we may come any more than they specify who may come. Coming is for anyone.

Perhaps you are one who has been holding back, resisting faith, just as Paul, Augustine, C. S. Lewis, and many others have resisted. It makes no difference here either, so long as you eventually commit your life into the hands of Jesus Christ. Let me give you a personal illustration of

this point. Some time ago, at the University of Pennsylvania, workers for Campus Crusade for Christ began speaking to a young black student who was apparently a Christian but who did not seem terribly interested in Christian things. His chief interest was in making the freshman basketball team, and he had been working toward this goal all through the fall of his freshman year. Actually he was resisting the gospel, but the Crusade staff did not know this then. They invited him to a fall conference at which I was speaking. He did not want to go. He had no money, he said. They gave him a scholarship. He then said he did not have a way to get there. The staff offered him a ride. When he arrived at the conference he had eaten no dinner, so he decided to go out for hamburgers instead of going to the first meeting. His dinner did not take up the entire time of the meeting, however, so he came in when it was just about halfway through. I did not see this student enter but, apparently, just as he came through the door (wondering whether he would make the freshman basketball team—the final try-outs were to be held on Monday) I said, "God loves you, whoever you are; he offers you a plan for your life." This word struck him as directly from God. He sat down and listened. He committed his life to the Lord, and he became the most effective witness of Christ's saving grace to the black community on the campus.

It does not matter how you come. You may come boldly, limpingly, reluctantly. The important thing is that you do come. Will you do that? Will you commit your life to Jesus?

When May I Come?

Finally, the words of Jesus are broad also as to when you may come. You may come at any time. You may come as a child. I am glad that children hear and respond to the gospel. Some say that you cannot preach to children, but that is untrue. Children can understand an enormous amount if someone will just take time to teach them. And they can follow Jesus. Are you a child? If you are, and if you can understand what I am saying, you should know three things: (1) you are old enough to sin, (2) you are old enough to die, and (3) you are old enough to come to Jesus. It is wonderful to come as a child. If you

come as a child, you have a whole lifetime ahead of you in which Jesus can mold you into the kind of person he would have you be and can train you for the kind of work he has for you to do. I am glad that Jesus called me when I was young, for most of the decisions of my life, even at a young age, were made in view of that call and in view of the fact that I felt led to a preaching ministry. Children, will you not believe in Jesus and follow him?

You may be one who is saying, "But I have missed all that. I could have come as a child, but I did not come. Now I am old, and it is hard to change. It is too late for me." No, it is not too late! I will admit that there are increasing difficulties associated with advanced age. There are habits of mind. A young mind generally is more open. But God is equal to these difficulties, and men and women in old age come also. Why not you? If a number of those who have lived long lives before believing in Christ will come to Christ, why should you not be among them? You may not be able to do very much for Jesus because of your age, but he can do everything for you. Yours can be a great testimony. Though you will have only a short time on earth to serve him, you will have an eternity through which you can praise him.

Spurgeon once wrote, "Oh, my dear hearers, come to Jesus! Come in the morning when the dew is on your branch, for he will not cast you out. Come in the heat of noon, when the drought of care parches you, and he will not cast you out. Come when the shadows have grown long, and the darkness of the night is gathering about you, for he will not cast you out. The door is not shut; for the gate of mercy closes not so long as the gate of life is open."

Will You Come?

Will you come to Jesus? The time is now; the place is wherever you find yourself at this moment.

A number of years ago I was in Egypt and stood on the banks of the mighty Nile River. Egypt owes her life to the Nile, so much so that the Egyptians have a proverb about it: "Egypt, the gift of the Nile." The

Nile brings water, which makes the country one great oasis in the midst of the desert; the yearly inundations have long provided fertilization for the rich, dark soil. Nothing is greater or more valued in Egyptian life than the Nile. Yet for all its importance, the Nile is free and abundant to anyone who finds himself by its banks. Any dog, any cow, any person can drink of the river of Egypt and drink all he desires. So, too, with the grace of God. The river of God's grace is freely flowing. All may drink of it. Will you drink? You need only stoop down and scoop it up.

Chapter 82.
The Keeping Power of God

John 6:38-39

Study of the sixth chapter of John has brought us to another great theme of the gospel, another plank in the system of doctrine known as the evangelical or Reformed faith. It is the keeping power of God. This aspect of theology has sometimes been referred to as the perseverance of the saints. But it is much better to speak of it as the keeping power of God, since it is God who perseveres with us far more than we with him. Simply put, this doctrine means that God never begins a work that he does not intend to finish and that, therefore, no one whom he has called to faith in Jesus Christ as Savior will ever be lost.

It is important that we understand this great truth, for, one way or another, our knowledge of it (or lack of knowledge of it) will affect our lives. If we do understand it, we will have a plank upon which we can stand, a foundation that is sure and upon which we can build.

Never, Never Drive Away

The doctrine of the keeping power of God is actually present in the verse that we studied in the last lesson, though we skipped over it then in order to stress the universality of the offer of the gospel to sinful men. The verse we were studying was John 6:37, which says, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will

never drive away." The last phrase of that verse—"whoever comes to me I will never drive away"—certainly opens the gates of heaven to any man, woman, or child who will come. The gospel is for you, whoever you may be. At the same time, it also is true that the verse speaks of God's power to keep the one who does come, and to keep him eternally. We see this particularly in the original text, for the Greek contains a double negative that, in effect, denies that the one who comes to Christ will ever be driven away—either now or later. We can capture something of the effect by translating the verse— "whoever comes to me I will never, never drive away."

This theme is now developed more fully in the verses that follow. Here Jesus says, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day" (vv. 38-39).

That... I should lose nothing! Not only is Jesus promising to reject no one who comes to him, he also is stating his determination to lose none of those who do come. Martin Luther saw this clearly and wrote, "Here Christ says: 'This is the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing.' He will not only refrain from expelling and rejecting anyone, but He is also resolved to keep them with Him and prevent anyone else from taking them from Him."

For All Believers

Who are the ones about whom the verse is speaking? Who are those who will never be lost? The answer is that the verse applies to all who will come to the Lord Jesus. The "all" of verse 39 is the same as the "all" of verse 37. So, whoever you are and however you may have come, if you have come to Jesus as your Lord and Savior, this truth is for you. You may be aware of it, or you may not. You may believe it, or you may not. You may resist it, or you may not. It does not matter. If you have truly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, then this verse is Jesus' own statement of the truth that you will never be lost. He will keep you.

You can know that you will be in heaven one day as certainly as you can know that the Lord Jesus Christ himself will be there.

Let me make that explicit. In the last study it was pointed out that some people come to Jesus boldly. They hear the gospel, and immediately everything falls into place. They believe it, and they are as certain of their salvation in that moment as they will be forty years hence. Others come slowly and with many misgivings. They are constitutionally cautious and unstable. They are like butterflies in the garden that flit from flower to flower without settling down on any of them. In business they go from job to job. In Christian circles they go from church to church. They never are quite sure of their salvation. If you ask whether they have believed in Jesus as their Savior, they reply that they have but are not sure whether they have believed enough. Are people like that kept by God? Yes! They are as much in his perfect care as the one who comes boldly and completely at the beginning.

The same thing is true wherever a person may be along the normal span of human life. Take a child, for instance. Can that child who has responded to Jesus really believe these things? Does he know what he is doing? The answer is yes. "But so much lies ahead of him. He has so much growing and changing to do. Might it not be the case that his mind will be filled with other ideas later on and he will fall away from Christ?" Not at all. For Jesus Christ is keeping him. If you are a child, look forward to a lifetime of service for Jesus Christ. You will grow, and as you grow you will find that Jesus is even more wonderful than you think him now. You will find that he is indeed able to keep you and that you will not be lost.

Someone else is at the other end of the spectrum. You are in old age. You face sickness, increasingly restricted movement, eventually death. "Will I be able to keep myself strong in faith?" you are asking. The answer is that God is able to keep you. He will persevere with you.
He will be as real to you in old age as he has ever been. In death he will be even closer. Moreover, even if you should be unaware of the fact that he is with you and will keep you and are fearful, that will not change

the fact. For Jesus himself has said that he will lose nothing of all that has been given to him by the Father.

Are you saying, "But suppose I should get to the point where I would deny him?" May I be bold enough to answer that Jesus will keep you even then. Do you need an example? Take Peter. Peter lived with Jesus for three years, but at the time of the arrest and crucifixion Peter denied the Lord with oaths and cursings. Did Jesus forsake Peter? No! Peter was far from the Lord in that moment, it is true. But the Lord was not far from Peter. So we read that Jesus turned and looked on Peter and then later appeared to him personally and recommissioned him to service. This doctrine of the keeping power of God is for all. It is for you—whoever you may be, however you have come, whatever you may or may not have done.

God Is Faithful

Second, not only is the keeping power of God for all who have come to Jesus, it is also absolutely certain. It is certain because both the will and the power to keep those who have come to Christ from falling are God's. It would not be a certainty if the will and power were man's.

Our text speaks of God's will. We are going to look at God's will in more detail in our next study. God's power is spoken of in a dynamic and lucid way in 2 Timothy 1:12. In this verse Paul, who knew these truths, writes of God's power to keep his spiritual deposits. He says, "Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day." The verse is powerful in English, but it has a special power in the French translation. The French translation of one phrase says, *Il a la puissance de garder mon depot*. The metaphor is that of banking; and the translation literally means, "God has power to keep that which I have deposited with him." In other words, the verse is telling us that when we believe in Jesus Christ for our salvation we are actually trusting that God will be able to keep our spiritual deposits, and it is asserting that he will indeed keep them.

Capital Deposits

Have you trusted in God through faith in Jesus Christ? If so, think of the capital investments you have placed on deposit with him. First, your faith for salvation. Can God keep that? Of course he can! We turn to the Bible and discover Christ saying, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28). Again we read, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35, 37-39).

The love of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a theme! How wonderful to know that nothing can separate us from such love! There are things that would try. Paul lists three possible causes of separation from God's love in Romans 8, but then he dismisses them all.

First, there is sin. An honest Christian knows that although he is justified by God he is still a sinner and sins daily in thought, word, and deed. Such persons worry when they look at the sin that clings all too closely to their garments. "Well, what of sin?" asks Paul. "Christ has died for sin (past tense), and thus, in God's sight our sin is gone forever." Suppose someone should accuse us? "God is the judge," Paul answers. The Christian has been acquitted before the bench of the highest court of all, and no one is authorized to reopen his case.

Second, Paul speaks of physical suffering. And not only external suffering—tribulation, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword—but internal suffering too, that anguish of the soul that often is known by those who undergo persecution for the sake of their Lord and for the gospel. We read, "Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered" (Rom. 8:36, quoted from Ps.

44:22). It is in such suffering that we can be aware of the sustaining love of God.

All the words referring to this suffering are interesting, but the word "tribulation" in the King James Version has a particularly vivid mental picture associated with it. In the Greek language the word that is translated "tribulation" originally meant "pressure." It is the word *thlepsis*. This originally meant any kind of pressure—the pressure of a hand upon a table, the pressure of the wind against a sail, and so on—but in time it came to mean pressure that was oppressive or burdensome. At this stage the verb meant "to afflict" or "to harass," and the noun came to denote "affliction," "distress," or "oppression." In the Latin language, from which we got our English word "tribulation," the word referred to an instrument for threshing grain. This was done by beating the wheat from the chaff. Thus, when the word was applied to the calamities of this life it referred to their destructive characteristics.

We know such tribulation also. Sometimes it is the physical oppression of those harassed for their faith. At other times the pressure is mental, resulting from ridicule or from the tensions of our fast-paced society. Whatever it is, however, we are to know that it cannot separate us from Christ's love. God is able to keep our spiritual deposits for salvation in the life to come.

The third potential cause of separation from Christ's love is the existence of supernatural powers.
But Paul says that even these cannot effect a separation. This was not an idle thought for Paul.
He knew the extent of spiritual wickedness in this world and had wrestled against it himself. Moreover, he knew that this was the ultimate dimension of the struggle inherent in the Christian life. To the Ephesians he wrote, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). But spiritual forces cannot be victorious over us.

The Bible says that Christ "having disarmed the powers and authorities, ...made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15). Can we be separated from God's love through things present or things to come? Not by these things either. For God has chosen us in Christ from before the beginning of the world, and we shall be with him in glory long after time has ceased to have meaning.

God's Workmanship

Our faith for salvation is only one thing that we have deposited with God, however. If you are a Christian, you have also deposited your faith that he is able to accomplish his purposes in you in this life. Can God keep that? Of course he can! We turn to Ephesians 2:10 and read, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." In other words, when we come to Jesus we step out of one kind of life into another kind of life and are committing ourselves into the hands of One who is determined to form us, direct us, push us, and (if it is necessary) even kick us in order that he might mold us into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We may take one more example. If you are a Christian, you have also committed unto God your faith that he is able to see you through temptation. Can God keep that? Yes, that too. For we read, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Cor. 10:13). Certainly God is able to keep our capital deposits.

And think what marvelous dividends he pays on the investment! It is not only that we are secure both for this life and the future but that we partake so richly of God's present blessings. There is a partaking of his love. There is joy. There is the peace that passes understanding. There are a thousand other blessings besides.

We are to be encouraged by the reality of these things in our lives. I once read the story of a little boy who went into a bank with just one

penny to open an account. He went up to the teller and said, "Please, sir, I would like to deposit a penny in your bank." With a serious expression the teller took the penny and wrote out a bank book in the boy's name. Then he handed it to the boy and the boy went off. A little while later the boy came back and stood there looking up at the teller. "Yes. What is it, young fellow?" the teller asked. "Please, sir, I would just like to see if my penny is still in your bank." The teller held up a penny where the boy could see it. The boy smiled and went away satisfied.

It is our privilege to do that with God. He is not made weary with our childish questions. So, if the time comes (as it does to many Christians) when we begin to doubt the reality of spiritual things and our security, God has arranged it so we can come to him and say, "Please, Lord, I would just like to see whether the spiritual deposits that I have placed with you are still in the bank." If we ask him, God will provide the assurance. That is why Paul can write in the letter to the Philippians, mentioning just one of our dividends: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

Where does it stand with you? Do you have faith in a God who is able to do all that he has promised—able to save, able to keep you from falling? Or are you uncertain, unstable? There is much that will make you unstable if you look first to the world instead of to God. Learn instead to look to God first, to that great God who is able to guard your spiritual deposits.

Chapter 83.
God's Will Confirmed by Jesus

John 6:40

There is nothing certain in this world but death and taxes!" So goes a very cynical saying. This may be true in part for the unsaved person, but it is obviously not true for the Christian. For one thing, Jesus Christ may return for his own at any moment, in which case death will be avoided. For another, the Christian looks at that saying with the realization that whatever the case may be for others, in his case at least there are things that are far more certain.

We come to a number of these certainties in this particular portion of John's Gospel. They are certainties, Jesus tells us, because they are founded upon the combined wills of God the Father and God the Son. We can gain some feeling for the full strength of this combination of wills by recalling one of the promises that Jesus gave to his followers. He said, "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven" (Matt. 18:19). If it is true that this shall be done upon earth in regard to our wills (when blessed and guided by the Holy Spirit), how much more true is it that this will be done when the wills of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are combined.

This, then, is the sense of John 6:40 in which Jesus says, "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I *will* raise him up at the last day." As we try to enter into this text let us look first at the sovereign will of God; second, at the fact that this will is confirmed by Jesus; third, at the areas in which the wills of God the Father and God the Son combine; and fourth, at the truth that God is determined to carry out his will for us now. Our conclusion will be that this good and perfect will of God should be confirmed by everyone who calls himself a Christian.

God's Will

We begin with the sovereign will of God. What are we to say about that will? To begin with, it is beyond and above anything that we can know on this earth; indeed, it is the origin of all things and that according to which all things are ordered. God's will is absolute. It is unlimited. It is determined only by itself. God needs to consult no one in formulating

and effecting his plans. God's will is independent. God's will is fixed, for it does not need to adapt to changing circumstances. It controls the circumstances, for it is omnipotent. "I the LORD," says God, "do not change" (Mal. 3:6). James writes that he is "the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). God's will is also irresistible, for he has foretold the end from the beginning and has promised to keep in his care all who come to him.

How would you change God's will? Would you change it for the better? You could not possibly change it for the better, for God's will is holy, just, good, and perfect. You cannot improve on perfection. Would you change it for the worse? Of course not, for we would not want God to be less than perfect even if that were possible.

"This is the will of him who sent me," says Jesus. We read that line, and we are terrified until we go on to read that the will of God is our salvation. Spurgeon wrote, "O God, I tremble at thy will, until I read those lines; I know not what thy will may be, and since I know it must be accomplished I cower down at thy feet in terror until I read that mercy is the Father's will, that love is the Father's will, that salvation is the Father's will, and then my heart flies into thy bosom with ecstasy and joy, to think that thine omnipotent, unchangeable will should be such good will; so full of benevolence, so full of love."

God's Will Confirmed

Second, this section of John tells us that the good and benevolent will of God is confirmed by Jesus. Jesus says, in effect, "Yes, I agree; that is my will also; I pledge myself to see that this perfect and loving will is effected."

Let me illustrate this truth by the way in which a constable of the state might pledge himself as surety for a star witness scheduled to appear in a trial. The witness has been chosen by the court through subpoena. He is in danger, because friends of the man on trial might attempt to have the witness killed to escape the impact of his unfavorable testimony. The judge calls the constable. He says, "I want this witness to appear in

court next Friday, and I want nothing to happen to him. I am committing him into your care. See that he appears at 10:30 A.M." The constable receives the witness and becomes surety for him, saying, in effect, "Your will is my will; I pledge myself to see that he appears next Friday at the hour appointed." That is what Jesus does for us, the only difference being that while a witness may be harmed in spite of the constable's care, with Jesus as surety none who are committed to him need ever fear being lost.

Jesus confirmed the will of God in the first instance by going to the cross. He said, "Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. To do your will, O my God, is my desire; your law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:7, 8; cf. Heb. 10:7). He further confirms that will by drawing back to himself all who wander, by sanctifying them, and by bringing them irresistibly to that moment when they are presented to the Father without any sin, spot, or wrinkle.

A Sure Salvation

In this section of John, three areas of God's will concerning us are mentioned. First, verse 37 tells us that the will of God is seen in our *election.* "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." Quite clearly, the plain sense of this passage is that God has chosen a great company of persons, all of whom he has given to Christ and all of whom will come to him. The verse further tells us that Jesus confirms this aspect of God's will by promising never to drive away anyone who so comes.

I do not understand why this doctrine is so vigorously resisted by so many, unless it is due to the fact that this is simply unlike man's normal way of thinking and runs against his desires. People have imagined that the responsibility of human beings for their sin is lessened if one speaks of election. But this is not true. It is true that some have preached election in a way that implies that people are not responsible, but this comes from following the dictates of reason rather than the plain teaching of the Word of God. God elects, but we are also responsible. Thus, I can stand in the pulpit and preach anything that an Arminian can

preach about man's sin and the necessity for him to surrender his will to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you have not believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, your failure to do so is your own responsibility; you are already, therefore, justly under condemnation. If you would be saved, you must come to Christ. *You* must do it. You must yield yourself to him. At that same time, I can come to a text like this and declare with equal force that if you do come it is because God chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world and quickened you irresistibly by grace so that your eyes were opened to see who Christ is and your will was moved to embrace him.

Someone has illustrated this by describing the door of salvation as containing two signs. On the outside—"Whosoever will may come." On the in-side—"Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world." You say, "But am I among the elect?" I do not know. Believe in Christ; I will tell you the answer after you either receive or reject him. If you do believe, it is because the will of God the Father was confirmed by the will of God the Son in your election.

Second, verse 39 tells us that the will of the Father is confirmed by the will of the Son in the matter of our *preservation.* "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day." This verse tells us that God's will is that no one who believes in Jesus Christ should ever be lost. It tells us that Jesus confirmed this will of his Father by promising to raise up all who do believe at the last day.

I find it interesting that the promise is literally that Christ will lose "nothing" or "no thing." This certainly means "none," but the fact that the pronoun is neuter suggests more than this. The meaning is that not even one part of those who have believed in Jesus will be left behind. It is not a soul salvation about which Jesus Christ is talking; it is a whole salvation. We are to be saved spirit, soul, and body. This text reminds us of God's promise to Moses at the time of the Jewish exodus from Egypt. When God delivered the people, he did not deliver some and leave the rest behind. He did not deliver the people and leave their property behind. The promise was, "There shall not a hoof be left behind." So

also for us the promise is that nothing that concerns any one of us will be lost.

Finally, the will of God is confirmed by Jesus in the matter of our entering into a *new quality of life now.* Verses 39-40 say, "And this is the will of him who sent me, that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." Eternal life is a present possession. Hence, this verse adds to the preceding thought of the keeping power of God the equally important thought that God is determined to accomplish his will in us now. We must not think that God begins a work in us at the moment of our initial faith in Christ, completes it at the moment of our death, but is completely indifferent to what happens to us in the meantime. That is absurd and unbiblical. On the contrary, the fact that God has placed his own, eternal and everlasting life within us is evidence that his will extends to the way we live, think, act, and grow now.

God Is Determined

Other verses also teach this. Philippians 1:6 is one: "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." This verse states that God is determined to carry out his plan in a Christian through this life until the moment in which the Christian dies or Jesus returns to take him home. Romans 8:28 and 29 also speak of God's present purpose in the life of a Christian: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

This is a remarkable statement if we really understand it. To put the matter bluntly, it means that God's great purpose (of which our election, calling, and preservation are only a part) is to make each person who believes in Jesus Christ like Jesus. It means that God is so delighted with his Son that he has created and called millions of sinful men to himself in order that he might reproduce Jesus Christ in them and so populate the universe with millions of Christs where there was only one

before. This does not mean that we will become divine. God is still God. We are his children, parts of his creation. But it does mean that we will be like him, like Jesus. This is the point in the whole matter of our present transformation.

I do not think this means that we will become increasingly aware of how good we are becoming. The opposite will be true. We will become increasingly aware of how sinful we are—like Paul, who early in his career called himself "the least of the apostles" (that is, he humbly called himself "number 13") but who toward the close of his life saw himself to be the "chief of sinners" (1 Cor. 15:9; 1 Tim. 1:15; cf. Eph. 3:8). We will not be conscious of increasing holiness. But we will be becoming more like Jesus even in becoming more aware of our sin. And we will be giving Christ more and more control over us so that his life will be seen in us increasingly. To put it in other words, it also means that what the Bible calls the fruits of the Spirit will be seen—"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). This, too, is an aspect of God's will confirmed by Jesus.

There is a somber side to this subject, however. It comes from the fact that there will inevitably be times when the sovereign and irresistible will of God comes into conflict with our wills and we will attempt to resist the inevitable. When this happens, God will begin to deal with us, and his dealings will become sharper and sharper until we return to the path in which he has determined we shall go.

In the world of science today everyone is talking about the theory of continental drift that seems to be increasingly confirmed by various types of core samplings of the earth and by accurate measurement of positions upon the earth's surface. According to this theory, the world's surface (both above and below water) is divided into large segments called plates. These plates are slowly and ponderously moving. Thus, to give an example, North and South America are part of one plate, and this is moving away from the plate on which Europe rests at a rate of about one inch per year. On the western coast of the United States, this same plate is being passed by the enormous plate that underlies the

Pacific Ocean. In this case the rate of drift is quicker, scientists estimating that adjustment along the edge is between four and eight inches annually. No one understands the forces that cause the great land masses to move. But they do move, and the movement is both fixed and irresistible.

The force of my illustration lies in the fact that earthquakes generally occur along the lines where these plates meet, but—and this is important—not at every point along the line. The San Andreas fault is an example. At places there have been violent earthquakes such as the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, or (farther south) the earthquake that devasted Managua, Nicaragua, in December of 1972. At other places along the same line there have never been earthquakes, and there will apparently never be any. What is the difference? The difference is simply that in the places where there are great earthquakes the edges of the two land masses lock in place and resist the movement. Pressure builds up; eventually the adjustment comes suddenly. In 1857, the Pacific side of the San Andreas fault jumped forward as much as 30 feet in the area of Fort Tejon near Los Angeles. On the other hand, in places where there are no earthquakes the land masses do not lock, and the adjustment is gradual. Geologists refer to the movement along these areas as creep.

May I apply that to the will of God for your life? God's will is as irresistible for you as the movements of the great, continental plates. We may not understand God's will, but it moves anyway and at its self-determined rate. What will you do? Will you resist it? If you do, the forces will build up and God will make the adjustment violently in your life. Or will you yield to it gradually? You will as by God's grace your eyes are opened daily to see his way and walk in it.

Chapter 84.
Murmurs of Disbelief

John 6:41-47

It is one of the surest facts of Christianity that when the doctrines of man's total spiritual depravity and the necessity for God's electing grace in salvation are preached there will be resentment by many who hear them. That was true in Christ's day, and it is true in our own. Moreover, we do not have to go far to find either contemporary or historical examples.

The Jewish Leaders

In Christ's day this is precisely what happened. So we are not surprised to find that Jesus' teaching about the necessity for God's grace in salvation, which we have in John 6:35-40, is immediately followed by an outbreak of protest and resentment by certain of the leaders of Israel. The author of the Gospel reports the moment by writing, "At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' They said, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he say, "I came down from heaven?"'" (vv. 41-42).

In these verses we have a change of persons from the verses that have gone before, and probably a change of place. Up to this point Jesus has been speaking in the open to the crowds that had followed him from the other side of the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum. Now he is speaking to the leaders who had heard his teaching, and probably speaking in the synagogue of Capernaum, as is suggested by verse 59. In this discussion Jesus restates his teaching and supports it by evidence both from the Old Testament and from experience.

The first thing we are told, however, is that the Jewish leaders "grumbled about him." The King James Version uses the word "murmur." What does that mean? To understand what that means and to understand how close it comes to what we do in our relationship to the gospel, we must realize that the word "murmur" is one of those unique words in the English language that exist solely because they sound like the thing they describe. "Hiss" is such a word. "Tinkle" is another;

"buzz" is a third. Such words are often used in poetry because of their unique character. One of the earliest examples of this device (known technically as onomatopoeia) is in Aristophenes' play *The Frogs*, in which one of the lines given to those who represent the frogs sounds like frogs croaking. Aristophenes wrote:

> Brekekekex co-ax, co-ax!

A better known example in the English language is Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Bells." To some degree the whole poem is built on this device, but these lines will be an example:

> Hear the tolling of
> the bells, Iron
> bells!
> What a world of solemn thought their
> monody compells! In the silence of
> the night
> How we shiver with affright
> At the melancholy menace of their tone!

In this stanza the words chosen by Poe suggest the matter being described. In exactly the same way then, murmur suggests by its sound what people do when they disagree with someone and protest what he is saying. Murmuring is the confused sound that runs through a crowd when people are angry and in opposition to some teaching. This is what the leaders of Christ's day were doing in regard to Christ's teachings. Others do it in our day. In fact, it is a sin that few, if any, are preserved from.

Christ's Answer

It is interesting, too, that the objections of the Jewish leaders took the form of a criticism of

Christ's person rather than a direct criticism of his teachings. They did not say, let us notice, "There are three reasons why we cannot agree with you and why we consider your views to be wrong." Christ's teaching was too consistent and too self-authenticating for that. Instead,

they attacked him personally, saying, in effect, "Don't listen to him. He is a nobody from the sticks of Galilee, the son of a carpenter named Joseph. Listen to us." In this they revealed their consummate snobbishness, demonstrated their pride, and revealed their ignorance. The irony is that they did not recognize at all that there had been a virgin birth and that Christ's true Father was God.

What did Jesus answer? It is important to notice that Jesus did not answer by defending himself on the personal level, as we might like to do. He could have done it, of course. But instead of this he returned to his teaching and restated it, giving two proofs. This was a challenge to his hearers to investigate his teaching for themselves. Finally, after having restated his teaching and given his proofs, Jesus stated the doctrine again for the final time. The verses that contain this read as follows: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets, 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, he who believes in me has everlasting life" (vv. 44-47).

We need to take these statements one at a time. First, Jesus repeats what he had said earlier, but here he does so in even sharper language. Before, he had said, "You have seen me and still you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me" (vv. 36-37). This implies that no one can come, apart from a special act of God on his behalf, but it does not say this negatively. Now Christ does. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."

This verse is so straightforward in its language that it has always been a battleground between those who are willing to accept the doctrine of election here taught by Christ and those who resist it on rational or humanistic grounds. It was discussed by Augustine and Pelagius, by Calvin and Arminius, by Luther and Erasmus.

The latter case is particularly interesting. Erasmus had been led to attack Martin Luther's teaching on the total spiritual depravity of man in a

volume centering on the nature of the human will and on whether it can function in turning a man or a woman to God. Erasmus said it could. Moreover, he answered the obvious objection based on the argument of Christ in this verse—the objection that no one can come to Christ except the Father draw him—by saying that God draws people in the same way that an owner of a donkey might get it to move by holding a handful of carrots before its nose. The man draws, but obviously the will of the donkey is involved. According to this theory, God originates salvation but man nevertheless cooperates in it.

This may make good sense to the natural human way of thinking. But it is not what Scripture teaches, and Luther said so quite openly. What better drawing could there be, Luther argued, than the drawing of the Lord Jesus Christ himself? He was present among the people. He taught them personally. Still they did not come. In fact, they killed him. Luther concluded, "The ungodly does not 'come' even when he hears the word, unless the Father draws and teaches him inwardly; which he does by shedding abroad his Spirit. When that happens, there follows a 'drawing' other than that which is outward; Christ is then displayed by the enlightening of the Spirit, and by it man is rapt to Christ with the sweetest rapture, he being passive while God speaks, teaches and draws, rather than seeking or running himself."

This was a good answer, of course. But we can go even further than this on the basis of Christ's statement. Luther's key word in answering Erasmus was "passive." He said that man was passive spiritually, inert, as inert as a dead man might be, if we may use that image. In John 6:44, however, there is in addition to this truth the thought that man also actually resists the work of God within. That is, he is not only passive; he also is perverse and obstinate.

We see this truth in the word that is chosen to speak of the Father's work in "drawing" a man or a woman to Christ. This word always implies resistance to the power that draws. William Barclay gives a number of examples of this in his devotional studies on John's Gospel. He shows that it is the word for drawing a heavily laden net to the shore, a net filled with a great number of fish (John 21:6, 11). It is the word that is

used of Paul and Silas being dragged before the civil authorities in Philippi (Acts 16:19). It is used for drawing a sword from the belt or from its scabbard (John 18:10). Always there is the idea of resistance. So here also there is the idea that men and women resist God.

Curiously, however, Barclay adds that "God can and does draw men, but man's resistance can defeat the pull of God." The curious thing about this statement, though, is that not one of his examples shows the resistance to be successful. The fish do get to shore. Paul and Silas are dragged before the magistrates. The sword is withdrawn. Indeed, we can go even further than this. As Leon Morris notes in his commentary, "There is not one example in the New Testament of the use of this verb where the resistance is successful. Always the drawing power is triumphant, as here." People resist. In this their depravity is seen. But the power of God always overcomes the resistance in those whom he has determined before the foundation of the world to give to Jesus.

Is this discouraging? Not at all. Actually, the fact that God does draw men and women to Christ in spite of themselves is our hope.

Evidence

At this point the Lord Jesus Christ gives two points of evidence to support his teaching. He did not need to give evidence, of course. His word was sufficient. Nevertheless, in speaking to these religious leaders he does support his statement—first, by a reference to the Old Testament, and then, second, by an appeal to experience.

His reference to the Old Testament actually is a partial quotation of Isaiah 54:13. Jesus says, "It is written in the Prophets, 'They will all be taught by God'" (John 6:45). As it stands in John's Gospel, we might read this verse with the thought that the "all" in the quotation applies to all men, thereby thinking that somehow God illuminates all, and men either come to Christ or refuse to come to Christ on their own volition. The full text, as Isaiah wrote it, shows that this is not the case. Actually, Isaiah wrote, "And all *your children* will be taught by the LORD." We see at once that the verse applies to God's children only, not to all men,

and that it implies that one must first be a child of God through the new birth before one can really understand about Christ and come to him.

Jesus then goes on to show that this truth is also confirmed by experience: "Everyone who listens to and learns from the Father comes to me." Why is it that you and I can present the gospel to some people and never seem to get anywhere, even when the circumstances seem entirely favorable? And why is it that others with maximum problems and limited understanding believe? The only answer is that God has taught the one person and has not taught the other. Moreover, all whom God has taught do come to Jesus.

Life before Faith

Finally, after having stated his teaching and having given two points of evidence to support it, Jesus repeats his teaching about the necessity of God's grace in election a final time. He says, "I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life" (v. 47).

I know there are many who have interpreted this verse in direct opposition to all that I have been saying. They have supposed that we are first to believe, after which, as a result of our having believed, we are given eternal life. But this would mean taking the verse in a way that would contradict all Christ's previous teaching. Actually, it is a summation of it all.

Perhaps this illustration, often used by Donald Grey Barnhouse, will help. We must imagine a battlefield over which troops are advancing in order to take a ridge that is just before them. Suddenly heavy fire opens up, and immediately the soldiers fall to the ground and hold their prone position until the enemy fire is silenced. Imagine further that all the soldiers are either dead, or alive and unwounded. When the firing stops the command comes once again to advance. Naturally, some of the soldiers do get up and move forward while others, the ones who are dead, do not. Why is it that the ones who do get up and advance get up? It is because they are alive and hear the voice of their commander. Does their getting up give them life? Of course not! It is rather the other way

around. In the same way, he that "believes" on Christ does so because he already has "everlasting life." The hearing and believing are the marks of the existence of the new life of God implanted within the individual.

If you are not yet a Christian, this doctrine applies to you in the sense that the grace of God in election is your hope. There is no hope in yourself, either in your spiritual attainments or in your ability. In yourself you cannot even choose Christ. How wonderful, then, that God is able to do what you cannot do. He can draw you. Be cheered by that and prove that he is already at work in your life by coming to him.

On the other hand, if you are a Christian already, I challenge you to allow these great doctrines to have their proper and transforming place in your heart. I am convinced that to accept the principles of Christ's teaching in this chapter of John's Gospel would necessarily involve both a mental and spiritual revolution for many thousands of Christians at the present time. It would certainly involve a radically different approach to preaching and the practice of evangelism, as well as to most other parts of church life and theology. The great question is this: Will the Almighty God of the Christian Scriptures be our God? Or will our God be something less, something tailored to our own greatly limited horizons? Let us have the God of the Lord Jesus Christ, of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and countless others, as our God. Let us stand with them in giving all might, majesty, dominion, power, and all glory in the matter of our salvation from beginning to end to that God only.

Chapter 85.
The Two Mannas

John 6:48-51

Several years ago I heard a story about a Scotsman who was coming to America. He had purchased passage on one of the great ocean liners. He

did not have much money, so he decided to save on food by stocking up on crackers, cheese, and fruit before his departure. The ship sailed, and he began to eat his Spartan meals. This went fairly well for the first four or five days. But as the ship drew closer to New York the crackers became increasingly stale, the cheese became moldy, and the fruit spoiled. Finally there was nothing left that was fit to eat. The Scotsman decided that he would go to the dining room and have one last, good meal before the liner docked in Manhattan and he went ashore. Imagine his surprise to discover that nothing in the dining room cost anything and that all that he could ever have eaten had already been included in the price of his ticket before he left the British Isles!

Unfortunately, this is the way in which thousands of men and women act toward the true bread of life that is offered to us without price in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is there for all. But the sad fact is that many would rather feed upon the dry crackers of human philosophy or the spoiled fruit of good works than come to him.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:48-51). We will enter into the full meaning of these verses when we recognize that in them Jesus Christ voices a great claim, makes a requirement, and offers a wonderful promise.

Christ's Claim

The claim that the Lord Jesus makes in these verses is, quite simply, to be the "bread of life." It is the second time in this chapter that he has described himself by this image, and the image itself constitutes the first of the great "I am" sayings that are a characteristic of this Gospel. Here Jesus is portrayed as the bread of life. Later he will say: "I am the light of the world" (8:12; 9:5), "I am the gate" (10:7, 9), "I am the good shepherd" (10:11, 14), "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25), "I am the way and the truth and the life" (14:6), "I am the true vine" (15:1, 5).

By these images he shows that he is all that men and women need and that he is the sole way to come to God the Father.

Another way of setting the context for this saying is to notice that it is the third great Old

Testament image that has been appropriated as a description of who Jesus Christ is and what he does. In chapter 1 Jesus has used the figure of Jacob's ladder upon which the angels of God were ascending and descending from heaven. This suggests that Jesus is the One through whom God the Father is revealed to men. In chapter 3 he is the brazen serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness. Here the crucifixion is portrayed, that work by which men and women are healed from the serpent bite of sin. Now he is the bread of life, the new manna, by which the new people of God are fed during the years of their desert wandering. There are two mannas, of course. There is the manna upon which the Jewish people fed in the wilderness under the direction of Moses. This manna sustained physical life for a time; but even this physical life did not go on forever, and eventually all who had eaten this literal manna died. There is also the manna that Jesus gives. This bread imparts and sustains that kind of life that will go on forever.

What does it mean when Jesus claims to be the bread of life? It means that he is able to satisfy the deepest needs and longings of the human soul. He is able to satisfy your needs, your longings, whatever they may be.

This does not mean that Jesus is going to satisfy every want or desire you may have or think you have. It means that he will satisfy that which you most deeply need. You say, "But aren't those two the same thing?" No, I do not think so. Let me give an example. Take a child who is beginning to grow up with a highly sharpened sense of what he "needs," as most children do. He thinks he needs candy—about every hour or so throughout the day. He thinks he needs to stay up to watch the late, late show on television. He thinks he needs to be able to set his own schedule—get up when he wants to, go in and out with his friends when he wants to, come to dinner when he wants to. He thinks he needs leisure time, particularly when he is asked to straighten up his room or help his mother with the dishes. All these items are "needs" from the child's point of view. But if the parent indulges the child in these, all he will produce is an unruly and obnoxious brat. What is more, when he

grows up the child will attempt to inflict his unrestrained desires on everyone else and may well end up in jail.

What is it that the child needs? It is not what the child *thinks* he needs. Actually, the child needs discipline. He needs a standard of right and wrong conduct and someone to insist on that standard. He needs to be loved, to have goals, guidance, and encouragement.

In the same way, our real needs often differ from our imagined needs, and it is our real needs for which Jesus Christ is the answer. We find salvation in him. In him we have eternal life. We also are loved, receive goals and guidance, and are encouraged in life. "I am the bread of life," said Jesus. The implication is that we should feed upon him and grow.

In this chapter Jesus gives what would be called in theology a "progressive revelation" of himself as the bread. It is as though he held the mystery of himself as the bread in his hand and then slowly opened his hand one finger at a time so that those who were listening to him would see the truth gradually. First, he spoke of a bread from heaven that the Father gives to men (v. 32). This was the opening of the first finger. After the curiosity of the crowd had been aroused Jesus opened another finger by pointing out that he was the bread about which he was speaking (vv. 35, 48). Finally, in the verses that we are considering, he opens his hand the whole way and shows that the bread is his body that will be given up in death for men and women. He says,
"And the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (v. 51).

I am glad that Jesus went on to speak of the cross, because Christ without the cross is of no use to us. We can look to his example, to the way he led his life. We can admire it. But the life alone does not help. We can admire the life, but we cannot live it. Besides, we are condemned by that life, for it is the standard of what God would require of us as his creatures. A Christ without the cross is of no use to us. He condemns us. Fortunately, there is more. For Jesus went on to speak of the cross and eventually to die upon it and rise again. Now there is hope. He died for our sin. The chastisement of our peace is upon him,

and with his stripes we are healed. In his resurrection life we now have life. In his righteousness, through his death, we are now reckoned righteous in the sight of a holy and loving God.

To understand these things is to understand not only why Christ is truly the bread that came down from heaven but also why he is necessary for spiritual life.

The Requirement

These verses not only contain Christ's claim, which is a great claim; they also make a requirement. The requirement is that we feed upon him. This means to believe on Jesus, commit your life to him, take him into yourself so that he becomes a part of you and you of him. It is precisely the same act that is spoken of in verse 37, where we are encouraged to "come" to Christ, knowing that those who come to him will never be cast out. Have you come? I do not mean, do you know about Christ? Many people know about Christ but have never come to him. The devil knows about him but hates him. I mean, have you committed your life to him so that now your life, properly speaking, belongs to Jesus? If not, you need to say, "Lord Jesus Christ, I want you to know that I accept all the things said in Scripture about my sin and my need of you. I know that I am not holy. I recognize that I cannot please you by my own efforts. At the same time, I recognize that you died for me on the cross two thousand years ago, and I want that death to stand for my death. I want to be yours. Receive me now as one of your followers, as your child."

Men and women have used many different words as they have prayed along these lines. Many who read this have come in different ways and have said different words as they have come. Still, at its heart the experience is the same. It is the experience of letting go of anything that you might present, in order that your hands might be empty to receive that righteousness that Jesus Christ gives. There is no substitute for that. If you have not done that, you are not a Christian, no matter how much you may know about the Christian faith. On the other hand, if you have

done that, then you are already a Christian and know that God has placed his eternal life within you and will keep you until the last day.

What I have been saying is born out in a forceful way by this imagery of eating. Think what eating involves. First, it is *necessary.* Other things are necessary too, but not to the same degree. A person might argue that exercise is necessary. Yes, it is good for you. But if you do not eat, before long you are not going to be able to do your exercises. Someone else might argue that the life of the mind is necessary. I agree. But if you fail to eat, pretty soon you will not even be able to sit up and read or think clearly. You must eat to live. So, spiritually, you must eat of the Lord Jesus Christ if you are to come to life spiritually and grow strong.

How do you feed upon Christ? It is through studying the Bible. That is one reason why I place such a strong emphasis upon a systematic study of the Word of God on the *Bible Study Hour.* It is why in my church I comment upon the Scripture readings at each of the services, as well as preach the sermon. It is why I encourage area Bible studies in which people can meet informally to learn and grow together as they eat and digest the Word. These are tools by which you and I can feed upon Jesus. There is no substitute for them.

If we use the Word, God will bring us into contact with Jesus. He will use it to bring to our minds what we most need to know; he will reveal sin in us and correct it; and he will most certainly lead us in the way that we should go.

Then, too, eating is always *a response to a need that is felt.* In physical terms the need is for nourishment and the feeling of the need for nourishment is hunger. It is the same spiritually. When does a person come to the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior or for daily feeding after he has believed on him initially? It is when he has recognized his need. If you consider yourself allsufficient spiritually—sufficient for this life and for the next—then it is not likely that you will come to the Lord Jesus Christ. However, if you have tried the allurements of this world and have found them to be empty, as many have, then there will be within you that sense of inner need and hunger that will drive you toward

Jesus. If you have been reading the Bible, God will show you that need for holiness that will turn you to him.

At one point in my ministry I was talking with a number of young people who had seen other young people turn to sexual indulgences as a means of satisfying the hunger they felt in their hearts. It had a hold upon them, as sin always does. They enjoyed it. They did not see how they could possibly stay away from this style of life. It was everything to them. But the interesting thing is that they were not happy. They were miserable. There is an old saying, "If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?" We could also say, "If sex is the way, why aren't you happy?" These young people needed to recognize that any way that is not God's way—that is divorced from Jesus Christ—is empty. They needed to see that Jesus is the bread that satisfies.

How I wish I could make that clear! Jesus is the only One who satisfies. You will never have to go far to find those who say the opposite. Madison Avenue exists for no other reason than to say the opposite. It says it all the time. Buy a car; you'll be happy. Take this vacation; you'll be happy. Use a detergent; you'll be happy. But it is not so. Do not permit yourself to be sold a bill of goods spiritually. Real joy comes from knowing the great God of the universe in Jesus Christ and from glorifying him forever.

Third, eating involves *appropriation.* Knowledge is not enough. It is possible to sit down at a banquet and identify all the dishes and even be able to address them by their French names—all the way from the *potage de legumes* to the *crepes suzette*. But if you do not or will not eat of them, they do you no good whatsoever. In the same way, it is possible to understand Christian doctrine so well that you can tell where everyone else is wrong—where Barth is wrong, where Brunner is wrong, where Boice is wrong—but you are still lost unless you appropriate Jesus Christ personally.

That, of course, leads to the last significant point about eating. It must be *personal. You* must eat. No one else can do it for you. It also is true in regard to your relationship to the Lord Jesus. You cannot get along by

saying, "Well, my husband believes ... my wife believes ... my children or my parents believe." The question is: Do *you* believe? Are *you* feeding on Jesus? I hope that you will never cheat your wife or husband or children or parents by asking them to do something that you refuse to do personally, but rather will give them the best of yourself by allowing God to make you into the kind of person he has always planned for you to be.

Life or Death

The last point is involved in all that has been said previously. It has to do with believing or not believing in Jesus. What are the issues? They are "life" and "death." It is not just a matter of a little bit of happiness versus more happiness or partial satisfaction versus greater satisfaction. It is life versus death. To know Jesus is to live—now and eternally. To refuse him is suicide.

There is no greater issue to be faced by anyone in the course of a normal human existence. Will you have life? God is the source of life; he gives it abundantly. Or will you choose that eternal death that comes from making yourself, rather than your Creator and Redeemer, the center of your spiritual horizons?

Do not do what the prodigal son did. He thought that he was going to find life when he left his father to enjoy himself in the city. We would say in today's jargon that he was determined to "live it up." So he took his inheritance and squandered it on riotous living. Did he find life? No, he found a life that to a Jew was a symbol of death. He was feeding unclean animals. When did life begin for the prodigal? Only when he saw his need, left his willful past behind him, and returned to his father. I covet that for you if you are one who has never really surrendered your will to Jesus and returned to him. Will you not come to him? Jesus is wonderful. He really is. He wants the best for you. Why do you not walk in that way willingly?

Chapter 86.
Food Indeed and Drink Indeed

John 6:52-59

Years ago, before the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. revised its Book of Order and with it the vows that were taken by ministers at their ordination, there was a phrase concerning "the peace, purity, and unity of the Church," which all who became ministers agreed to encourage. They promised to "study" these points, which meant to advance them. The difficulty lay in the fact that it was not always possible to promote the peace and purity of the church concurrently. Peace could be maintained without purity. Purity could be achieved without peace and unity. But to do both at the same time was difficult. The reason was that truth always will have enemies and that pure doctrine always will be opposed. Actually, I would go so far as to affirm as a rule of Christian experience that strong teaching of strong doctrine will inevitably produce discord in some Quarter.

This is not experience limited to our own time either. It goes back to the time of the Lord Jesus Christ. An example is found in the verses that immediately follow Jesus' claim to be able to give his flesh for the life of the world.

Jesus had said, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (v. 51).

This bothered those who were listening to him, with the result (so we read) that they "began to argue sharply among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'" (v. 52). This time, however, Jesus repeated his claim in even stronger terms. He said, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and

I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever" (vv. 5558).

It is interesting as an insight into the problems of our own times, that in answering those who were in conflict over his teaching Jesus did not try to tone down the teaching to make it more palatable. If anything, he did the opposite. It would seem, then—to make a conclusion—that, according to Jesus, truth concerning doctrine leading to a genuine peace, rather than peace at the expense of doctrine, was to prevail.

Not the Lord's Supper

But what do these words mean? What does it mean to eat Christ's flesh and drink his blood? If we are to understand them, we must begin first by realizing that they do not refer—as many, including Raymond E. Brown in his comprehensive commentary for the Anchor Bible series, have believed them to refer—to the Lord's Supper or the communion service.

Many have looked at the sixth chapter of John in this way, of course, particularly those whose theology gives a high and mystical value to the sacraments. Generally speaking, there have been three major views of the Lord's Supper. The first is highly literal. It is the view of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox communions, as well as of some high church Anglicans and
Episcopalians. According to these churchmen, the bread and the wine of the communion service are literally transformed into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ by an ordained priest and thus become, at least to some, a reenactment of Christ's sacrifice. Clearly, to those who take such a position, the words of Christ in John 6 must refer to the mass, or Eucharist. They literally describe what is happening. The worshiper literally feeds on the Lord.

The second view of the Lord's Supper is that it is a mere memorial or testimonial. This understanding focuses on the words "Do this in

remembrance of me" and on Paul's statement "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). Certainly, there is truth in this view, but it is weak in that it does not indicate how Jesus can be present in any special way to those taking part in the service.

The third view, which was the view of John Calvin and of the Reformed church bodies, is that Jesus is actually present in the communion service but that he is present spiritually, not in any physical way. Calvin called this understanding the doctrine of the "real presence." We often say, in speaking of God, that God is everywhere present. It does not mean that he is physically present in physical objects, for that would be pantheism. It means that he is present spiritually. We also say that God is present in a special way with those who are his children; that is, he dwells within them. So he is present in Christians in some ways more than he is in the world. Moreover, even as Christians we often say that God is with us more at some times than at others, by which we mean (I assume) that we are more aware of his presence or that the lines of communication are more open. It is in this same progression but in an added sense that we speak of the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Lord's Supper. This presence is spiritual. It is, therefore, received spiritually, which is to say, by faith.

These, then, are the three great understandings of the meaning of the Lord's Supper which have prevailed in the church and according to which, particularly in the first instance, the sayings of Jesus in John 6 have been interpreted.

It is my view, however, that the Lord's Supper is not in consideration in these verses at all. Why?

First, because at the time of the speaking of these words the Lord's Supper was not yet instituted.

Second, because Jesus was addressing unbelievers in John 6, while the Lord's Supper is for Christians only. Third, because the eating and drinking spoken of in John is unto salvation, while the eating and drinking that is part of the Lord's Supper is for those who are already

saved, and speaks of fellowship, growth, and communion. Fourth, because the Lord's Supper does not produce those results that are here attributed to the eating and drinking of Christ. This last is the greatest reason, for it is perfectly obvious that many thousands of persons partake each week of the Lord's Supper and yet do not possess that eternal life that Jesus says results from a true feeding upon him.

Feeding on Christ

If it is true, then, that the eating and drinking that Jesus speaks of in John 6 does not refer to the Lord's Supper, to what does it refer? Or, to put it in other language, what does it mean to feed upon Jesus? The answer to this question is that eating Christ's flesh and drinking his blood refer to that which Jesus has been speaking of all along. He has said that men and women must "believe" in him (vv. 29, 35, 47). They must "come" to him (v. 35). They must "look at" him (v. 40). They must "listen" and "learn from" him (v. 45). All these terms—believe, come, listen, learn—refer to what we would most naturally call faith. The last terms—"eating and drinking"— stress that the commitment that is involved in faith is as real, irrevocable, and productive of results as any literal eating or drinking.

Have you committed yourself to Jesus Christ so that he has become as real to you as that? Is he as real to you spiritually as something you can taste or handle? Is he as much a part of you as that which you eat? Do not think me blasphemous when I say that he must be as real and as useful to you as a hamburger and french fries. I say this because, although he is obviously far more real and useful than these, the unfortunate thing is that for many people he is much less.

If Jesus has not become as real to you as eating and drinking, let me suggest that you do something similar to that which a bride does in promising herself to her husband. Before the ceremony the bride can do anything she likes. In fact, if she wants to, she can even cancel the whole wedding, for she can decide even at 1:58 that she has made a mistake and cannot go through with a 2:00 ceremony. However, when the ceremony begins she comes to the place where she speaks her vows

and, on the basis of those vows and those of her husband, is pronounced a wife, his wife. She is now no longer her own. At the same time, her groom pronounces his vows to her, and he becomes hers no less than she becomes his.

Apply this now to him who is the faithful lover and bridegroom of the church, and to you and me who are his bride. It is he who has courted us and wooed us. We did not choose him. It is he who has pronounced the vows first of all. His vows were pronounced in eternity long before the foundation of the world. He said, "I, Jesus, take you, John Smith (Mary Jones, or whatever your name may be), to be my wedded wife. And I do promise and covenant, before God and these witnesses, to be your loving and faithful husband, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, for time and for eternity." We looked up into his loving face and eyes, believed his promise, and repeated his vow.

In the case of the church something great happened between the speaking of this promise by Christ and our repetition of it. Between his vow and our vow, Jesus went to the cross where he paid an infinite price for our sin, purchasing us so that we could be free of sin, guilt, and shame as we come to him. We see his sacrifice. With that in mind we repeat, "I, sinner, take you, Jesus, to be my wedded husband. And I do promise and covenant, before God and these witnesses, to be your loving and faithful wife, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, for this life and for eternity."

That is what faith is. That is what it means to eat Christ's flesh and drink his blood. It is to commit yourself to him. It is to accept his promise and pledge on your behalf and to repeat his promise, vowing to be his for eternity. If you have done that, you have done the most important thing there is to be done in this life, regardless of what you may already have accomplished or may yet accomplish. If you have not, you should know that today is the day of salvation. Today is the day of your union with Christ, if you will have it so.

Results of Feeding

There is one more point that we must see in studying these verses. It is that there are certain results that come from feeding upon Jesus. The verses suggest three of them.

First, we receive the certainty of our salvation. This result is seen primarily in verse 54, where we are told of the gift of eternal life and of Christ's promise to raise us up at the last day. What is eternal life? Some who have disagreed with the doctrine of eternal security, the doctrine that no one who has come to Christ will ever be lost, have stressed that the eternal life that we receive in salvation is a special quality of life, rather than life of infinite duration. But while I would not deny for a moment that eternal life is a life of special quality, I am convinced that we must also go on to say that it is indeed eternal. Eternal life is the life of God. It is without end because he is without end. This truth is certainly affirmed in this passage, for Jesus immediately follows his mention of the gift of eternal life with the promise that he will raise up those who have been given eternal life at the last day (so also in verses 39, 40, and 44). What a great promise! How good to know that nothing will ever separate us from the One who loves us and who has taught us to love!

Second, we enter into a life-transforming union with Christ as a result of coming to him. This thought is expressed in verse 56, where the idea of union with Christ is mentioned for the first time in John's Gospel. It will become very prominent later, particularly in the last discourses. Here Jesus says, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him." What does it mean that we are joined to Christ and he to us? The fact that we are joined to Christ means that we have a change in our life and status. Let us go back to the wedding illustration. Before the wedding the bride has one status; afterward she has another. For one thing, there is the change in her name. Henceforth, she will bear her husband's name. There is a change in her legal status. Before, she could buy or sell property as she chose. Now there must be joint signatures. There is a psychological change; she senses a subtle difference between being single and being married. There is a social change that will penetrate even to the matter of who her friends will be,

whom she will entertain, how her time will be spent, and other matters. When do these changes take place? The answer is that they take place instantly and simultaneously in the moment when she is joined to her husband. So it is spiritually. At the moment when we are joined to Christ through faith and by the new birth, we receive a new name—we are now Mrs. Christian instead of Miss Sinner—and a new way of life with new relationships and obligations is opened before us.

On the other side, the fact that Christ is joined to us means primarily that we receive his life and are to go on receiving it in increasing abundance throughout eternity. We are to be filled, as Paul says, with "all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19). Right now we are a bit like a quart bottle that has been filled with seawater. It is real seawater, but not much is in the bottle. But suppose you were able to enlarge the bottle so that it would contain a gallon. In that case, you could then put in three more quarts of seawater. The larger the bottle became, the more water it could hold—until, if it were big enough, it could conceivably be filled with all the fullness of the sea itself. In the same way, God promises to enlarge our spiritual capacities until the full life of the infinite Christ is reproduced in us.

Finally, the words of Jesus suggest that we receive strength for the living of this life as we feed upon him. He says, "So the one who feeds on me will live because of me" (v. 57). This verse is not talking about eternal life primarily; it is talking about our present daily life to be lived in Christ's power. Galatians 2:20 is another statement of that principle. "I have been crucified with
Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Do you live by that life of the Lord Jesus Christ? That life is there in all its strength and purity. It is there to feed upon. By that life and that life alone we can grow.

Chapter 87.
Discipleship Tested by Doctrine

John 6:60-65

After the Lord Jesus Christ had left Judea, where he had encountered hostility, and had gone into Galilee, it seemed that for a time people were attracted to his teaching and were flocking around him. He had performed miracles in Galilee—turning the water into wine at Cana, healing the nobleman's son, multiplying the loaves and fish by the side of the Sea of Tiberias. This had attracted so much attention that for a time as many as five thousand people followed Jesus to hear his teachings. In a short while, however, the real nature of his claims became apparent.

When this happened, many of his followers went back and no longer walked with him. We see the beginning of this toward the end of the sixth chapter of John's Gospel.

How did the ministry go in Galilee? Exactly as it had gone in Judea. The Lord Jesus Christ had been popular. Many had followed him. Then, as he began to teach, his doctrine became the measure of his followers' discipleship, and most dropped away. John, therefore, concludes the chapter by showing what happened, not among Christ's professed enemies but among his apparent adherents—the general company of his followers (v. 60) and the Twelve (v. 67).

Hard Sayings

If we are to profit from this section of the Gospel, we must be very clear in our understanding of why those who had appeared to be disciples dropped away. John says, "On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?'" And he adds, "Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, 'Does this offend you?'" (vv. 60-61). The reason lies in the fact that Christ's teachings were "hard" to accept. The Greek word is *sklēros*, and it clearly does not mean "hard to understand." It means "hard to tolerate."

So long as Christ's followers could not understand him, they stayed around and asked questions. It was when they did understand him that they went elsewhere. They left because what they heard was so contrary to their own views that they would not accept it.

This applies to our own day and to ourselves. Often, when professing Christians criticize a true servant of God, one who is really giving out God's truth, and complain that his teachings are "hard," the real cause is not the difficulty of the doctrine but rather the unwillingness of the people involved to accept what they hear. Perhaps it conflicts with their own views. Perhaps it is different from the traditions of their fathers. Many of these persons also copy the men of Christ's day in another way, for they grumble among themselves as they drop away rather than coming directly to Jesus Christ to state their difficulties.

What were these teachings the crowd found difficult? They are the same ones that men and women find difficult to accept today.

First, there is the doctrine of Christ's incarnation with all that this implies for his person. Jesus said that he was the true bread that came down from heaven (vv. 33, 38, 51). This implied that he had existed before his physical birth and that he had a special relationship with God. He was God's Son, possessing the divine nature. He had come as God in order to take human nature upon himself. The crowd obviously understood what Jesus was saying, for we are told in the other Gospels that when he said such things they were immediately ready to interpret what he had said as blasphemy. God come in the flesh? This they could not accept. There are many who will not accept it today.

Secondly, Jesus was teaching that he needed to go to the cross. This truth lies in verse 51, which says, "And the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." How hard this is to accept and truly understand! Those who heard Christ might have argued that they could understand how a person should pay for his own sin, even die for it if the crime were great enough. They could understand how salvation might be earned. But to think that Jesus Christ had to earn salvation for them and that they would therefore have to receive it

as a free gift from him or not receive it at all—this they found objectionable. This is the primary difficulty that most of our contemporaries have in accepting Christianity.

Finally, Jesus had taught that the reason why most of those listening did not believe on him was that in themselves they could not believe and that they could come to believe eventually only if God had previously determined to give them to him. These are the rudiments of that system of doctrine known as the Reformed faith—man's spiritual inability to please God and the necessity of God's electing grace in salvation. Jesus had said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (v. 44). He had said, "All that the Father gives me will come to me" (v. 37). Nothing is more calculated to arouse the ire and rebellion of the human heart than this teaching. But it is true. Christ did not hesitate to proclaim it.

Each of these teachings ran counter to the normal way of thinking of those living in Christ's time, and they run counter to the normal way of thinking today. The question is: Are we willing to change our opinions to conform to the teachings of Christ? Or will we persevere in error? Obviously, we need to have our discipleship corrected by Christ's doctrine, and to learn not to evaluate spiritual matters by the measure of our own understanding.

Christ's Answer

Jesus answered by asking, "Doth this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!" (vv. 61-62). I do not think the meaning of this verse is self-evident, at least it has not been self-evident to commentators, for they take different positions in referrring to it. Some think of it as a reference to the cross. Some view it as a prediction of Christ's ascension. Let me tell you what I think it means.

Years ago I heard a story told by Donald Grey Barnhouse, which will make this particular interpretation remain in your mind forever. Barnhouse had been visiting foreign mission fields, and while he had been doing this his family had been living in Berlin, Germany. There

was a world-famous zoo in Berlin in those years to which Mrs. Barnhouse and the children went often. So when Barnhouse returned from his travels, and after the reunion, this was the first place the children wanted him to see.

In particular, they wanted him to see Rupert. Rupert was a magnificent sea lion weighing several tons, and he was kept in an immense pool that he had to himself. Everyone in Berlin loved Rupert. And they especially loved to be at the edge of the pool when he was fed each day by his keeper. Rupert would mount a platform and then catch the fish that his keeper threw to him. There were many fish, for Rupert had a great appetite. And with each fish Rupert would have to stretch out farther and farther to catch it. Finally, as the keeper reached the bottom of the bucket, the fish would be thrown so far out over the water that Rupert would have to leap from his perch, catch the fish in the air, and then come crashing down into the pool spraying water everywhere. It was this sight that the children wanted their father to see.

The family did see this together. And, in addition to seeing it, Barnhouse also filmed it on a small movie camera that he had purchased. Later, when they had left Berlin, the film was shown; and all this action unfolded on the screen. When he got to the end of the reel, however, Barnhouse stopped the projector before the film had entirely run through and threw the wheels into reverse. Now everything that the children had seen began to run backward. First there would be an enormous amount of water, which sprang up from all over the pool and began to disappear into a hole that had appeared in the middle. Then out of this hole came Rupert, all three or four thousand pounds of him, and he gracefully floated back through the air to land on the platform. Moreover, as he did it he spit out a fish that went flying back through the air and landed in the keeper's bucket. This show became far more popular than the right way of seeing the pictures. So, every time that the pictures were to be shown the children would cry, "Please, Daddy, make Rupert spit fish!"

You can see at once why this story has remained in my mind, and you will be able to see, I believe, how this graphically illustrates what Jesus

meant when he asked, "What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!" It was not his future ascension that he was looking forward to, but rather his descension that he was remembering. He was saying, "Are you offended at my teachings? Do you find them hard? Well, then, what if I were to retract them and retract the whole plan of redemption? What if I were to put the whole film into reverse and go back through the early days of my ministry, back through my childhood, be unborn, and then reascend to my Father? What would you do then?"

What would we do? What could we do? Our case would be hopeless, desperate. But, thank God, Jesus did not do that. He went instead to the cross, giving his life as a ransom for our sins; he ascended, and he is sitting today at the right hand of the Father, watching as the Father through the efficacious working of the Holy Spirit brings men and women to him. I look at those truths and see my salvation written plainly in them. Jesus did die. He died for me. Therefore, my salvation is eternally secure unless Jesus should reverse the whole plan of salvation even now, which he obviously will not do.

Not Flesh, but Spirit

But then Jesus went on to say something else. His first answer had been to ask, "What if I were to reverse the whole plan of redemption?" The conclusion is that it is far better to have Christ's ministry, even though it has doctrines that are difficult to accept, rather than have no ministry at all. But then he went on to add: "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (v. 63). This sentence adds the truth that it is only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that we can understand his doctrine.

It is not difficult to understand what that means. We see it, first of all, in the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus. People have said, "Wouldn't it have been wonderful to have known the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh? Wouldn't it have been glorious to have walked with him, to have heard his voice, to have traveled about with him as he moved from place to place during his three-year ministry?" I suppose that for some it would be wonderful. But the interesting thing is that many in Christ's day did

just that but nevertheless did not believe and eventually "turned back and no longer followed him." Knowing the Lord after the flesh did not necessarily profit those who were with him. Thus, Jesus was saying that it was his thoughts, words, and acts that were to bless them—not his outward appearance—and that even these had to be conveyed to the heart by the Holy Spirit if blessing should come.

On one occasion a woman said to Jesus, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." But Jesus said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (Luke 11:27-28).

Then, too, this principle is true of our life as Christians today. It is not the external trappings of religion that bless the soul, but rather the Word of God as it is carried to our understanding by the supernatural intervention of God's Holy Spirit in our lives. This is true of any outward form of religion. Baptism is a good thing; it is commanded by God. But baptism does not save an individual. In fact, it has even become a curse in some denominations where it has been practiced upon unbelievers, for it has given the impression that all is well with their souls when actually they are children of wrath and under condemnation.

Take communion as a second example. Communion can be a blessed event. But it is also true that it is observed regularly by thousands who have never truly committed their lives to Jesus Christ, and so it is totally ineffective. The works of the flesh profit nothing if the Spirit does not give life.

Bible reading is another example. So is prayer. So is church membership. These aspects of Christianity are of great value if the Holy Spirit is blessing them to us and if we are seeking his blessing. But they can also be used in an unbelieving, formal way and so achieve nothing. We grow in the doctrine of Jesus only when we allow the Spirit of Jesus to interpret his words and apply them to our hearts.

Words of Life

So, what will you do with Christ's words? Will you heed them, allowing the Holy Spirit to bless you through them? Or will you turn away from them, as many of Christ's followers did? It is true that no one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws him, but this does not eliminate human responsibility to heed Christ's words. Notice the balance of truth in Christ's statement. He said, "The Spirit gives life." That is the divine side. In this work God operates by himself, and no man participates. But Jesus also went on to say, "The words I have spoken *to you* are spirit and they are life." *To you* speaks of human responsibility. The teachings of Jesus are directed to you. Do you believe them?

If you are not a Christian, your obligation is to read God's Word and to see yourself and your need reflected in it. Moreover, it is to follow that true Word wherever it leads you and to come (for it leads in this direction) to the Savior.

On the other hand, many who read these words will be Christians. What is your obligation? Your obligation is to take these words to those who are lost and who will certainly perish without them. This is your prime responsibility. I know that we have other obligations also. We are obliged to feed the sick, comfort the sorrowing, care for the destitute, provide for widows and orphans. You will not neglect these good works. But even as you do them you will remember that the truly great and lasting changes in this world, those that determine history and human destiny, are those that take place in the realm of the spirit through the preaching of God's Word. You must give yourself first and foremost to that work.

You are to feed on Christ's words, digest Christ's words, live Christ's words, exude Christ's words. Many pressing concerns will attempt to dissuade you. People will try to discourage your commitment. Do not be discouraged. Proclaim Christ's teachings to those who will receive them and to those who will not. Proclaim them to the rich and to the poor, the educated and the uneducated, the high and the low, the privileged and the disadvantaged. As you do, God will use them to draw men and women to the Savior.

Chapter 88.
Nowhere to Go but Forward

John 6:66-68

I do not know if you ever attempt to visualize the scenes of Christ's life when you are reading about them in the Gospels, but I do occasionally. I have found myself doing this as I have read about the early enthusiasm and later defection of the crowds who came to hear Jesus in Galilee.

I see it in cinematic terms, contrasting the apparent success of the morning about which these verses are written with the pitiful sight that occurred later as Christ's former followers left him. I can see them coming in the early hours of the dawn as the sun rises over Galilee. They had been with Jesus in the wilderness the night before. Now they gather in the town of Capernaum until at last, with the streets bursting with crowds and the synagogue fully occupied, they press their questions upon him. Unfortunately, the answers of the Lord are not those they desire to hear. So, as the day wears on, these apparent followers defect. At last the day ends as it had begun. Jesus is alone with his own close followers, the disciples. If I were filming the scene, I would contrast the morning with the evening, showing the small group who remain standing quietly, looking out over the lake as the last enthusiasts of the morning depart in the darkness to their homes.

This is a poignant scene, but now it becomes even more poignant. For, instead of congratulating himself on the fact that the Twelve had remained behind with him or allowing them to congratulate themselves, Jesus quietly turns about and asks this question: "Will you also leave?" It is a simple question, but it is one that must have cut deeply into their hearts and minds and that cuts into our hearts also. Will we go away? Will we be as some who have heard the Word of God, have even professed to believe it, but who have turned their backs upon Christ and Christianity? Or will we stay?

God grant that we may all be able to answer with Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (v. 68). It was a profound question and a profound answer. Both the question and the answer are profoundly relevant to all who hear them and who should be able to echo Peter's answer today.

A Relevant Question

Look for a moment at why this question is so relevant for those who are living today. It is relevant, first of all, because some of whom it is asked are not true Christians and will surely go away.

Some will *betray* Christ. Do you doubt that? If so, look at the men to whom Jesus himself was speaking. Here were twelve men whom he had picked out to be with him and help him. He certainly had good judgment, much better judgment than any minister or officer who votes on admitting a person to membership in a particular congregation today. Yet one of these men was Judas. He was a man who had never believed in Christ in a saving way—for Jesus termed him a devil—yet he was with the other disciples and was unknown by them in his true character. Eventually he betrayed the Savior.

Is it too much to say that there are Judases within the visible church today? I think not. There are some who profess to be Christians, who even hold office in Christian churches, but who have never been born again and who may one day openly turn their backs on all they have stood for previously. These are those who go out from us because they are not of us. Are we among their number? Could we be? Instead of a glib answer, we should let that question go around among us as it went around the table in the upper room: "Lord, is it I?" We should search our hearts to see if we have really committed ourselves to the Savior.

Second, the question is relevant because, in addition to the fact that some will certainly betray Christ, each of us could *deny* him. Here was Peter. Peter was born again. Moreover, Peter is the very one who utters the correct answer to Christ's question in this story—"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Later on he would say,

"Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you" (Matt. 26:35). Yet the time came when Peter was shaken and did deny Jesus. Jesus was arrested, and Peter stood by. A little girl asked him, "Weren't you with Jesus of Galilee?" Peter said, "No." Another declared, "This fellow was also with Jesus." Peter denied it. Later, another one said, "Surely you are one of them, for your speech gives you away." Peter denied for the third time that he knew Jesus, this time with cursings. I suppose that in the context of the Jewish culture of the day Peter would have sworn by some veiled reference to Jehovah. "In the name of God Almighty, I do not know Jesus Christ." What a comedown for Peter! But what about ourselves? If this could happen to Peter, it could happen to us. Will we also go away? Will we deny Jesus?

I would like to encourage you to be strong, to stay, to give a forthright and lasting testimony to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. It is not terribly difficult to gain an audience for the gospel message, particularly in this country in this day when, like the men of Athens, Americans seem to live only to hear or tell of some new thing. But to keep those who come for years and to build them up into a strong community where the gospel is openly confessed and the standards of Christianity are upheld—this is difficult, for men vacillate. Spurgeon wrote, "There is a constant winnowing going on in all churches, and this drives away the light and chaffy ones. There is a fan at work upon this floor.... Be not as the chaff.... Better far that we die than that we deny the Lord."

A Searching Answer

We have looked at the question; we need now to look at Peter's answer. Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." This has reference to the thought of going back, and Peter is expressing his view that having once come to Jesus such a thing is unthinkable. Is it unthinkable to you? Or would you consider turning back?

You say, "I am so discouraged right now, I think I might." Well, then, let me ask this: What would you go back to? Is there anything in your past

that can compare with Jesus?

Would you go back to your *former way of life? You* know what your way of life was before you came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It may have been characterized by a great emptiness or lack of meaning and purpose. God filled you and gave your life meaning. Would you go back to your emptiness? Your former life may have been filled with the excesses of sin. It may have been drunkenness, drugs, sexual licenses, or other things. You were ruining yourself by your sins. Will you turn back to those? The past may have been characterized by worldliness, in the sense of assuming the world's values. You may have been on a great ego trip from which you have been delivered by the Lord Jesus Christ. Would you go back to that? Was that so satisfying?

If nothing else should do it, your own self-interest should demand that your pathway be forward. When Christian was face-to-face with the devil in Bunyan's account of his travels to the celestial city in *Pilgrim's Progress,* he thought how dearly he would love to go back and escape the conflict. However, when he thought of his armor, he remembered that he had none for his back. He had a shield, a breastplate, a helmet, a sword, but nothing for his back. So he realized that if he should turn around, it would be the work of only a moment for the devil to slay him with his spear. He therefore resolved that however bad it might be to go forward, it would, nevertheless, be worse to go backward. So he fought on and gained victory. Think of that fact when you are discouraged or tempted. Retreat is impossible! Press on!

Let me remind you of a second inadequate alternative. Would you go back to the *secular ideologies* of our age? There is the ideology of progress. This word characterized the aspirations of the nineteenth century with all its advances in commerce, science, medicine, communications, and transportation. Some thought that we were headed toward a golden age in which all would live in peace and all forms of sickness and ignorance would be wiped out. But that has not happened. Sin is still with us. Science has not conquered it.

Some have been caught up in the ideology of world peace. This often was spoken of at the time of World War I, the war that was supposed to make the world safe for democracy. But World War I was followed by World War II, World War II by the Korean War, the Korean War by Vietnam. Foolish was the man or woman who thought that the American withdrawal from Vietnam would be the end of all wars!

Did your past hold the secular ideology of maximum human freedom? This philosophy billboards all forms of control or any type of restriction as an enemy and believes wholeheartedly that all will be well if only men and women are released to do their own thing. We have seen this philosophy at work in education and in other areas. But it is like saying that a garden will produce the most beauty if it is left to itself. Does it? I suppose there are some who might consider weeds beautiful and desirable—just as they consider crippling nationwide strikes, abortion on demand, open homosexuality, and anarchy beautiful and desirable—but for most sane men and women these are still weeds. They do not compare with the beauty that results from careful control and cultivation. Was freedom apart from Christ so wonderful? Was it real? Would you go back? Or did you first find real freedom in serving the Lord Jesus?

Perhaps your past held the ideology of agnosticism. This is the view that denies the possibility of finding answers to the deep questions of life—Who am I? Who is God? What am I here for? and so on. Questions are good, but what is the value of asking questions if you fail to find answers?

What Christian would want to return to that?

There is a third area of the past to which you might be tempted to return. I have spoken of your former way of life, as well as the secular ideologies of our time. There are also *false religions and false religious leaders.* If your past contained these experiences, would you go back to them? How about the cults? How about the eastern religions? Were they the answer?

Finally, would you go back to that *dead moralism* that characterized the lives of so many of us before we became Christians? Before we came to Jesus Christ we were bent on a life of high moral attainment, but we found that the life we attained failed to satisfy anyone except ourselves—and it did not even satisfy ourselves most of the time. Did you have the sense that you were really pleasing God? I would be surprised if you did. Did your wife approve? Your husband? Your parents? Your children? If so, why did you have so much trouble with your personal relationships? Besides, when you came to Jesus, did not this involve the confession that your own efforts were empty and that you needed a righteousness that you could not find in yourself? Of course it did! So your experience is similar to that of the apostle Paul who pursued high ethical ideals but who, after he had found Christ, recognized that his past achievements were worthless (Phil. 3:8). Would you go back to the scrap heap of your morality?

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." I do not know where you could go to escape Jesus, even if you wanted to go back to those empty things that characterized your past. I doubt if you could even escape the suspicions of others that you have been with Jesus. Remember Peter. Peter denied the Lord with oaths and cursings. But he had just spent three years with Jesus, and as a result there was something in his speech that betrayed him. If you have been with Jesus, you will never be the same again either. No matter how you swear, someone will smoke you out and declare, "Surely you are one of them; you have been with him." David asked, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast" (Ps. 139:7-10).

Bound to the Master

The conclusion of this is that if you have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior—if you are truly united to him through the

miracle of the new birth—then there is no way for you to go but forward. A threefold cord binds you to him. Peter speaks of it.

First, there is nowhere else to go. Peter acknowledged this in the tone of his question. You have acknowledged it as I have reviewed the alternatives in this study. Who will have you after you have been with Jesus? Jesus was not wanted. He was killed. His followers down through the centuries have been killed. Who will take you in when the door has already been shut against your Master?

Second, you have learned that there is satisfaction in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ and that true satisfaction can be found in him only. Peter said, "You have the words of eternal life." It was said by the Greeks that that man would always be unsatisfied with human food who had once tasted the nectar of the gods. That is a description of your case if you are a Christian. Jesus said, "Drink of me, and I will satisfy your thirst; feed on me, and I will satisfy your hunger." You have done that. You have had heavenly food. Now anything else will seem flat by comparison.

Finally, as Peter says, "We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." Thus, to go back now would be not only a crisis of faith; it would be intellectual suicide and dishonesty. It cannot be done. We know too much to prove faithless.

I wish I could tell you what the future holds for you, but I cannot. It may be that the future is bright. I often think this, for the trends of our day (in my opinion) are opening wide, wide doors for Christianity. It is a day of opportunity. The next generation may be the generation of the widest possible opportunity for the proclamation of the gospel and for witnessing and growth in history. If our day is the day of opportunity, we shall advance. We shall go forward. I am also aware, however, that days of opportunity often are followed by days of harsh persecution and that the chaff may be greatly winnowed out in our lifetime. The time may come when you and I may be persecuted. What shall we do then? How can we do less than those great martyrs of the faith who have gone boldly before us?

In the year 1555, in Oxford, England, Hugh Latimer, that great English bishop of the
Reformation period, was led to the stake to be executed. Ridley was with him. These men had come to prominence as spokesmen for the Reformation in England under Henry VIII and had carried the true gospel of salvation by grace into every hamlet in the nation. But a change had come. Bloody Mary was now upon the throne, and godly men everywhere were being executed. Like one who had run a good race and who had kept the faith, Latimer went to the fires calmly. At the last he called out, "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as (I trust) shall never be put out."

If the time should come when you or I should find ourselves in that position, I trust that we too shall be strong. We cannot turn back. There is no place to go but forward.

Chapter 89.
A Disturbing Revelation

John 6:69-71

I do not know why the apostle Peter appeals to me as much as he does, but I suppose it is because I am so much like him. I could say it is because Peter is so much like us Americans. On the negative side, he is impetuous. He speaks without thinking. Because he speaks without thinking he almost always is wrong. He also is overly confident. So one of the first things Jesus needed to teach him was that he was actually ignorant, weak, and cowardly. On the other hand, Peter is loyal, good-natured, and extremely anxious to learn and do the right thing. So when he is close to Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit he occasionally has great insight into divine truth and speaks truly.

This was the case in each of his great confessions of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. One of those confessions is well known. It is recorded in

the sixteenth chapter of Matthew in which Peter declares, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).

A lesser known but equally great confession occurs in the verses that close the sixth chapter of
John. On this occasion Jesus had asked the disciples if they, like the Galilean crowd, would go away from him. Peter had answered on behalf of the others, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." He then concluded, "And we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (6:69 RSV). In this confession Peter employed a phrase that is very uncommon in both the Old Testament and the New Testament—"the Holy One of God." It is so uncommon, in fact, that some of the scribes who were copying the New Testament during the early days of its transmission felt compelled to alter it and at the same time make this confession conform verbally to the confession of Matthew 16. The result was the version we have in most of our Bibles. But this was not what Peter said in Capernaum. Peter said, "You are the Holy One of God." The importance of the phrase lies in the fact that as he said it the others would naturally have thought of that other very popular phrase used of God himself—"the Holy One of Israel." In other words, there is no other possible place that Peter knew to assign to Jesus. He was the "Lord"—Jehovah. Peter was placing him with God and not with man.

Faith and Understanding

Peter's confession of faith is also interesting because of two words Peter used to indicate how he came to know this truth about Jesus. They are "believing" and "know." The most important thing about them is their order: first belief, then certainty. It is the divine order for true understanding in spiritual things.

Let us admit at the outset that this runs counter to our natural instincts and to our natural way of doing things. From a human point of view, who ever heard of believing in something in order to be sure of it? We want to make sure of something before we believe in it. We want to test out a person before we trust him. God reverses the order. Take these

examples. David declared, "I am confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living" (Ps. 27:13). Jesus said to Martha, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:40). In Hebrews we are told, "By faith we understand" (Heb. 11:3). There is a reason for this, of course. Quite simply it is because divine truth is beyond us. God's ways are not our ways. So we will begin to know and understand God's ways only as we begin to know and (in part) understand God. And we can begin to know God only through trusting him. Assurance, insight, knowledge—these are the fruit of believing. Certainty that Jesus is the Son of God comes, therefore, not by listening to the arguments of professors or by reading the latest of theological books or articles, but rather by believing what God has said about his Son in the Scriptures.

I admit that if this were a matter between men only, then to believe without seeing would be foolhardy. However, in dealing with God it is logical. God has never made a promise that he has not fulfilled in its proper time. His word is his bond. Moreover, if we do not believe him, then we actually are casting doubt upon his character.

Did you know that God has strong words to say about those who will not believe his testimony concerning Jesus Christ? We read this statement from him: "We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son" (1 John 5:9-10). This is a great and sweeping statement, but it is important because it affords an insight into the heart of God. God tells us that he wants to be believed.
Moreover, he tells us that he wants us to believe him because of who he is.

These verses compare our belief in people with our belief in God, and they point out that we do believe other people. We believe in men, or in what men say, every day of our lives. If we did not, we could never ride a bus, go to work, attend a concert, sign a contract. These activities all

involve acts of faith. They all involve the word of another person, sometimes even when we have not seen him or her. "Well," says God, "if you can believe other people, you can believe me; if you do not, you are dishonoring me." There are many men and women so refined and polite that they would never think of calling anyone a liar; yet they make a liar out of God every day by their unbelief. God says that they should believe him exactly as they believe other human beings.

The secret to arriving at a point of certainty in spiritual things is that we must believe what God tells us. Then, believing, we will find knowledge following. It is striking, is it not, that this is illustrated by the chapter we are studying. For the certainty Peter spoke of did not come primarily from viewing Christ's miracles—the turning of water into wine, the healing of the impotent man at Bethesda, the multiplying of the loaves and fish, or the walking on the water. It came rather from hearing and believing the "words of eternal life" that Jesus, the Holy One of God, had spoken.

One Is a Devil

At this point the sixth chapter of John reaches some sort of a climax as the result of Peter's confession. It is true that most of Christ's followers have left him. Still the Twelve have remained, and Peter has even spoken on their behalf to voice a great confession. If we were writing the Gospel, we would end the chapter at this point and go on to some new theme in chapter 7. Interestingly enough, however, John does not do this. For John is a realist, and he is portraying, not merely the growth of faith in Jesus, but also the emergence of hate for him and its intensification. Therefore, in this chapter Peter's confession of faith in Jesus is followed by a disturbing revelation.

There is some irony in the situation. Peter had spoken on behalf of the Twelve, saying, "We believe and know...." But Jesus, who knew the hearts of men as his disciple did not, replied, "We? Did you say 'we,' Peter? You may not believe it now, but I tell you that one of you, one even of this small number, is a devil and will one day betray me."

Actually, he did not say "betray" at this point, though he did so later. It is the evangelist himself who adds this note for clarification.

Here is a warning for us. We cannot see into the hearts of men either, though we would like to. We think at times that we have insight into men's character. Sometimes God gives insight. But still we usually see only the externals and so make many errors. "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). Then let us allow God to do it, and let us exercise great caution and humility in our evaluation of other men and women.

Why Judas?

Verses 70 and 71 tell us that Jesus saw into the hearts of men and knew that Judas was not a believer and would one day betray him. But if this is so (as it is), why did he choose Judas? Why not another?

The first and easiest answer to that question is that Jesus chose Judas because the Scriptures foretold it. John 17:12 tells us that, for it says, "While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled." The reference is to Psalm 41:9 and similar passages. Jesus chose Judas to fulfill these passages. But to say this is only to push the question back one stage farther, for now we must ask, "But why did God cause such Scriptures to be written? Why did God ordain Judas to be among the twelve disciples?" Here we are helped by a number of wellthought-out comments by Arthur W. Pink, one of the most thoughtful commentators on John's Gospel.

First, as Pink notes, the choice of Judas by Jesus *furnished an opportunity for Christ to display his perfections.* When Jesus had come to earth he had professed, "Here I am ... to do your will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). This will was written "in the volume of the book," and it included the choice of Judas as one who would betray him. This was a trial for Jesus, beyond any doubt. Judas was associated with Jesus for the three years of his ministry. They moved in the closest possible contact. Yet Judas was the devil's tool. Even when Jesus retired alone with the

Twelve to escape the worst of his critics, Judas was there with him. Still He did not hesitate to do what the Father demanded. It is in his full subjection to the Father's will, written in the book, that his perfection as the incarnate Son may be evaluated.

If you are being tried, remember the perpetual trial faced by Jesus and learn that God has sent these trials into your life just as surely as he ordained the presence of Judas among the Twelve. Why? If there are no other reasons, there is at least this one—that God may display the perfections of Jesus within you as you endeavor to live for him.

Second, the choice of Judas *provided an impartial witness to the moral excellency of Christ.* Pink observes, "His Father, His forerunner, His saved apostles, bore testimony to His perfections; but lest it should be thought that these were *ex parte* witnesses, God saw to it that an *enemy* should also bear witness. Here was a man that was 'a devil'—a man who was in the closest possible touch with the life of Christ, both in public and in private; a man who would have seized eagerly on the slightest flaw, if it had been possible to find one; but it was not: 'I have betrayed ... *innocent* blood' (Matt. 27:4), was the unsought testimony of an impartial witness."

Third, the choice of Judas *gave occasion to uncover the awfulness of sin.* Imagine spending three years in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Imagine all that Judas saw in that time— demonstrations of the love of God for a sick and sinful humanity; revelations of wisdom; a total lack of all the sinful aspects of human character, no pride, anger, lust, impatience, loss of selfcontrol; total selflessness. Now imagine betraying such a One. That is how terrible sin is. The fullness of redemption brings to light the wonder of divine love. But it also was ordained that the fullness of redemption would expose something of the full horror of that sin for which the atonement was being made. Moreover, they are connected. For we will only begin to comprehend the height and depth of this divine love when we begin to see something of the nature of the sin for which Christ's blood was poured out.

Fourth, the presence of Judas *supplies the sinner with a solemn warning.* A person may experience the closest possible contact with Jesus and still not come to him for salvation. He may hear Christ's teachings, witness great miracles, observe the changed lives of others who have yielded to Christ and have believed on him, and yet not be born again. Judas was with Jesus, and he did not believe. Perhaps you are like him. You may have been raised in a godly home. You may have heard great preaching. You may have seen others believe, perhaps even in your own family. But you have not believed personally. Their faith will not save you. *You* must believe. Do not allow proximity to cheat you out of faith in the Savior.

Fifth, the presence of Judas *shows us that we may expect to find hypocrites among the followers of Jesus.* Judas was certainly a hypocrite. Think what it meant for any one of the Twelve to follow Jesus. It meant leaving home, going without any sure and certain shelter, being tired from hard journeys, preaching the gospel that Jesus instructed his disciples to preach. Judas did all these things and did them so well that, so far as we know, not one of the disciples ever suspected him of being what he was. Yet underneath it all he was no friend of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he eventually betrayed him.

There is no way of saying this nicely, but it must be said. There are Judases among the apparent followers of the Lord in our day. They are in our pews, even in our pulpits, and they are sometimes undetected. They betray the Lord and the gospel by both their words and actions. Jesus warned us to watch out for such. He called them wolves in sheep's clothing.

Sixth, the presence of Judas among the Twelve *affords us one more illustration of how radically different are God's thoughts and ways from ours.* Pink writes: "That God should appoint a 'devil' to be one of the closest companions of the Savior; that he should have selected 'the son of perdition' to be one of the favored twelve, seemed incredible. Yet so it was." Therefore, since we have seen that God did have good reasons for this selection (in spite of our thoughts to the contrary), let us learn to trust God in matters for which we can see no reason. Let us humble

ourselves before him. Moreover, since we can see that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, let us learn that our thoughts must change.

Peter or Judas?

Here are two men brought together in the space of just three verses—Peter and Judas. One made a great confession. About the other we have a disturbing revelation. Which one most characterizes you? Both were with Jesus. Both gave evidences of a genuine interest in religion. But with one it was real; he was there because of Jesus. The other was there only for himself, or for what he could derive from the relationship. May I make it even more personal? What are you into Christianity for? Is it for Jesus? Or is it for yourself? I cannot promise that if you come to God out of a genuine love for the Lord Jesus Christ you will find the road easy. The company is usually good, but the road is rocky. It leads to a cross. Nevertheless, I can promise that Jesus is even more than you might hope for or realize, and beyond the cross there is glory.

Chapter 90.
What Time Is It?

John 7:1-10

Few things in this life are as important as time, but time often is wasted and thereby becomes unimportant. Moreover, it often is spent on that which later proves to have no meaning. When life is empty, time drags. Macbeth knew this and cried, "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day." When life is full, time flies. Ovid declared, "The stream of time glides smoothly on and is past before we know." Seeing life and fortune fall before it, he also termed time "the devourer of all things." Shakespeare spoke of "the tooth of time." William James declared, "The great use of a life is to spend it for something that outlasts it."

But how do we know what will outlast it? Since we are bounded by time, how can we see beyond its horizons? One answer to how we can make our time count, not only for this life but for eternity also, is to be found in a saying of the Lord Jesus Christ to his brothers just before he went up to Jerusalem for the final time to begin the last phase of his work on earth.

Just before this, Jesus had concluded his work in Galilee. He had been there some time, and he had met with initial success. Nevertheless, as the true nature of his teaching became known and his claims became understood, the crowds that had once followed him willingly gradually drifted away. Eventually, he was alone with his disciples and, to judge from this narrative, in contact with his family. He seemed unwilling to leave Galilee, for he lingered there for approximately six months. This is the period between the time of the Passover, by which the events of John 6 are to be dated, and the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, which is the time note of chapter 7. The opening verse of chapter 7 explains the reason for Christ's delay in returning to Jerusalem—he was "purposely staying away from Judaea, because the Jews there were waiting to take his life."

At this point Jesus' brothers approached him. The Feast of Tabernacles was approaching, and it was their recommendation that Jesus go up to the feast with them and do miracles there. Perhaps they thought this would revive Jesus' sagging popularity. They were not altogether altruistic in their suggestions. John tells us that even his brothers did not really believe in him.

Jesus' reply was emphatic. It was not for them to tell him where and when to go. There was a great gulf between them and, besides, his steps were ordered. His exact words were, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. You go up to this Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come" (7:6-8). John goes on to tell us that Jesus remained for a time in Galilee but eventually made his way to Jerusalem secretly.

God's Time and Our Time

If we are to understand what Jesus meant by declaring that his time was not the same time as the time of his brothers (and if we are to gain insight from that for the time that is given to us), we must begin with the recognition that God's time is different from our time. In fact, it is questionable whether we can use the word "time" in reference to God's time at all. Time is a word for creation, and God is not in time. God is outside time. He stands in eternity. Consequently, we should not make the mistake of applying time concepts to him.

There is no good illustration of how God relates to what we call time, because every illustration, every word that we can draw upon, has time limitations. Nevertheless, some people have been helped by the following. We must imagine a river winding across a countryside. It begins in a mountainous interior, passes down through evergreen forests, across coastal plains, and into the sea. Moreover, we may imagine a man in a rowboat making his way down this river. He is in the mountains on Monday, among the trees on Tuesday, in the midst of the plains on Wednesday, and at the river's mouth on Thursday. For him, the mountains, forests, plains, and sea are in a time sequence. He sees only one of these geographical features at a time. On the other hand, we can imagine a pilot flying five miles above the earth's surface, and we can see that for him all the geographical features are present at the same time. He can see all the way from the mountains to the seas in one glance. God sees like the pilot because he is not confined by time. We can make the same point also by imagining time to be something like a motion picture. We view it in sequence. God views it as though it were millions of individual frames, all seen at once. From his perspective God sees Adam and Eve, Abraham and Isaac, Christ on the cross, you and me, simultaneously.

This is not just an interesting play of the imagination, of course, for it has bearing on what we understand of God and his relationship to our days. We see it primarily in the area of what you and I call "decision." For us, a life in time is filled with decisions. We make decisions constantly, and we do so in an effort to cope with variableness,

ignorance, previous indecision, and other things. Our decisions are attempts to deal with problems not previously considered. God's decisions are not like this because of the nature of his relationship to time. There is no variableness or indecision with God. Consequently, his decisions are rather in the nature of eternal decrees, unchanging and unchangeable. The Westminster Shorter Catechism speaks of these decrees saying, "The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass."

I believe that this could be a great step forward in your spiritual life if you can see it. God does not make decisions because he suddenly is confronted with a problem that he has not foreseen. He determines both the problems and their solutions in advance. He is never surprised, never caught off balance. Thus, there is never a problem that baffles him or a work that he does not intend to finish. Because of this we can rest in him and trust him for the ordering of our days.

The Time of Jesus Christ

The importance of these truths becomes particularly clear in relationship to the time of Jesus Christ, for here was God, the inhabitant of eternity, now living in time. What do we learn about the time of Jesus Christ? We learn that the time (or times) of Jesus Christ was fixed by the eternal decrees of God.

As we read the New Testament we are amazed at the number of verses that indicate that Jesus was born, lived, and died according to the fixed plan of God. For instance, Galatians 4:4-5 tells us, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." In Revelation 13:8 Christ's death particularly is placed in this context as John speaks of "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world." Paul links the same event to the prophecies of Scripture in 1 Corinthians 15:3, saying that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."

On the day of Pentecost, in the first truly Christian sermon, Peter linked both the element of prophecy and the fixing of time by the Father to Christ's crucifixion. "Men of Israel," he said, "listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:22-23). Later, in his first epistle, Peter repeats the same truths in writing to Christians: "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake" (1 Peter 1:18-20).

Naturally, there are many more verses that could be cited. But we can draw all the important conclusions even from these. (1) The death of the Lord Jesus Christ was the most important event of his life, and it was eternally planned and determined by God. (2) Not only his death, but also the details of his death and other minutia of his birth and life were similarly determined. (3) When Jesus came to this earth, he was conscious that the events of his life were marked out for him by God. And (4) since these things are true, it follows that everything planned by God for Jesus Christ and revealed to us in the Scriptures has been accomplished.

One very important conclusion flows from this. If the events of Christ's life were ordered by God, as we have seen, then it follows that the most important thing that can be said about the death of the Lord Jesus Christ is that God the Father caused it. God the Father put Jesus to death. In the history of the church there have been times when men and women have emphasized the role that the Jewish leaders had in Christ's crucifixion. This has led in a very unjustifiable way to much anti-Semitism. It is true, of course, that the religious leaders did have a part in Christ's death, but this is relatively unimportant. Others, to counter this line of thought, have emphasized that it was actually the Gentiles,

in the person of Pilate, who sentenced Christ to death. But again, while this is true, it is nevertheless relatively unimportant. The important thing is that God the Father put Jesus Christ to death and that he did so in order that there might be an atonement for our sins.

Imagine a trial in which a judge is obliged to impose a heavy fine upon his own son for some act of juvenile destruction. He imposes the fine, then steps down from the bench, taking his place next to his son, and pays the fine for him. This is an illustration both of the incarnation and of Christ's death. The incarnation is God stepping down from the bench. The cross is God in love paying the fine that he in justice has imposed upon us. Can you understand this illustration? If you can, then you can see that the cross is God taking your place because he loved you and wants you to love him.

A Fixed Time Schedule

There is one more point that must be brought into focus here in order that we might understand John 7:6 and apply these truths to our own situation. The point is this: Not only were the events of the life of Jesus Christ predetermined by God, as we have seen, but even the time at which they occurred was determined. This is the only truth that gives meaning to our text. For on one day Jesus refused to go to Jerusalem, but then just three or four days later he reversed himself and did go.

The Bible does not provide us with detailed time references for every event of Christ's life. But in Daniel there is a reference to the time of his death that is so exact that we are justified in applying the same principle, the principle of time-determination, to all the events of his birth and ministry. The revelation to Daniel concerning the coming of Christ was focused in a period of seventy weeks. A week, in this phrase, as is evident from the context, concerns a period of seven years; that is, a week of years. We might say a "heptad" if we had that word in our language. There were to be seven weeks of years, by which time the city of Jerusalem was to be rebuilt, following its destruction by the Babylonians. Then there was to be a period of sixty-two weeks of years, by which time the Messiah would have come and died. The prophecy

says, "Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing" (Dan. 9:25-26). Here is a full prophecy of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for sin, and it is dated in history from the year of the issuing of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem.

When was this decree? It has been dated from several sources as having been issued in 445 B.C. Consequently, the latest possible date for the death of the Messiah, according to this prophecy, was to be 483 years later (that is, sixty-nine weeks of years, or sixty-nine times seven). The year arrived at by this reckoning is A.D. 38. Jesus must have died by then. Moreover, if the more accurate reckoning of the great British scholar Sir Robert Anderson in his book *The Coming Prince* is accurate, the dating may be even closer that this. Anderson's calculations place the end of the 483-year period on April 6, A.D. 32. Clearly, then, even the precise years and days of the events of Christ's life were determined.

Moreover, this tells us a great deal about the nature of the Scriptures. In the seventeenth century an English astronomer by the name of Edmund Halley announced, on the basis of Newton's newly discovered laws of gravity, that the brilliant comet that had been seen in Europe in the year 1682 would return in 1759. Halley died in 1742, seventeen years before the time he had predicted for the comet's return. But in 1759 the comet did return, right on schedule, and the laws by which he had calculated its orbit were vindicated.

In the same way, the Scriptures of the Old Testament foretold the time of Christ's coming, even though those who had originally been the vehicles of their writing and who had received them died. The years dragged on. Throughout the ages all who had faith in God looked to the heavens and awaited the fulfillment of these prophecies. Finally a star was seen in the sky, and the wise men who followed it arrived at Bethlehem where the young child was found. The birth gave way to the life, the life to the crucifixion, the crucifixion to the resurrection and

ascension. All that had been planned and determined by God concerning Jesus Christ was accomplished. The Scriptures were vindicated. Thus we were also given a firm basis for our confidence in God and our hope in Christ's return.

The conclusion to this is simple. It is that our time can either be like the world's time, like the time of Jesus' brothers, or it can be like the time of Jesus. If it is like the world's time, our time has no meaning—at any rate, no more than we ourselves are able to give to it. On the other hand, if it is like the time of Jesus, it can be filled with meaning. Your time can become part of that great and eternal drama of salvation that is God's plan for the ages. If you are not a Christian, I encourage you to come to Christ for salvation and begin to allow him to plan your time. If you do, he will give your life meaning and fill all your times with opportunity.

Perhaps you are already a Christian and yet do not see how your time has been made meaningful. Do not be discouraged just because you cannot see it. God sees it, and he both knows and has planned what is happening.

Years ago I saw a film I will never forget. It was produced by the Moody Institute of Science by using both high speed and time lapse photography. It was called *Time and Eternity*, and its premise was that many things in this world escape us because we are locked in a fixed time progression. Some things move too fast for us to see. The flight of an insect is an example. The film revealed this by filming at a very high speed and then slowing the film down for projection. Other things move too slowly—the growth of a flower or the moving of clouds. When these are filmed slowly and then speeded up for viewing, the dance of a growing flower or the churning, billowing excitement of the clouds is breathtaking. We can see each of these things physically, but we miss the beauty because we are locked in our own time system. In the same way, we often miss the beauty of what God himself is doing in our lives, not because we cannot see the individual features of his work but because his work is either too slow for our comprehension or too fast.

Trust him, and rejoice in the fact that one day your perspective will be his own.

Chapter 91.
What Do You Think of Jesus?

John 7:11-13

Once, in preparation for an interview period on the *Bible Study Hour*, the staff of the radio program went out onto the streets of Philadelphia to ask people this question: "Who is Jesus Christ?" Sometimes they asked, "Do you think Jesus Christ is God?" The answers they received were illuminating, for they revealed the confusion that exists in many person's minds about the identity of this remarkable man from Nazareth.

One young woman responded, "Jesus Christ was a man who thought he was God." Another young woman, a biology student, replied, "Jesus Christ is pure essence of energy. God to me is energy, electric energy because it's something that's not known." A man told us, "I think that's something you have to decide for yourself, but he had some beautiful ideas." Others replied, "He is one that we look up to as our leader"; "he is an individual who lived two thousand years ago, who was interested in the social betterment of all classes of people"; "he was well liked; he meant well; he was a good man." Most people asked were just confused. They answered, "I haven't any idea.... I don't know...."

The confusion that exists in most people's minds about Jesus of Nazareth was not the only thing our interviewers detected, however. The interviews also showed the fact that, in spite of their confusion, most of those who were asked about Jesus could not quite escape him. No one said, "I couldn't care less." Quite a few actually seemed embarrassed by the question.

Who is Jesus Christ? This is a question that men and women have been asking ever since Christ's time and that needs to be asked and answered again and again in each generation. Jesus had delayed in going up to the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, and while he delayed the people were asking questions about him. "Where is he?" asked the priests. "Who is he?" asked others. John then says, "Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, 'He is a good man.' Others said, 'No, he deceives the people'" (John 7:12).

The One Impossibility

Who is Jesus Christ? I want to help you answer that question (in case you have never faced it squarely). But I want to begin by talking about the one truly impossible answer. The one truly impossible answer is the answer that was given first by the people of Jerusalem. They said, "He is a good man." Many give this answer today, but it is the one thing that Jesus most certainly cannot be.

Why is that? It is because of the peculiar nature of his teachings. One of their most obvious features is what John Stott calls their "egocentric character. "Jesus' teaching is all wrapped up in himself. For instance, Jesus often spoke of the Fatherhood of God, but whenever he did that he seemed always to go on to speak of the special relationship that he had to the Father, possessed by no other. He even had a special word for God, *abba,* which revealed his special relationship. It meant "daddy." No contemporary Jewish figure ever used this word for God; it would have been thought irreverent or even blasphemous. Yet Jesus used it. Moreover, he went on to teach that because of what he would accomplish on the cross, and *only* because of that, others could come to enjoy this relationship also.

The egocentric character of Christ's teaching is seen also in the great "I am" sayings that are so prominent in John's Gospel. "I am the bread of life," Christ said. "I am the light of the world." "I am the gate." The last of these—"I am the way and the truth and the life"—is categorical in its

teaching that faith in Christ is the sole way by which a sinful man or woman can find a right relationship to God and enter heaven.

A careful study of Christ's teaching will reveal that Jesus considered the Scriptures of the Old
Testament to have been written mainly about him. Moses "wrote about me," he maintained (John 5:46). "Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). Using the books of the Old Testament as his text Jesus explained to his disciples those things that were written "concerning himself (Luke 24:27). One great example of this outlook occurred early in his public ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth. Jesus had been asked to read from the prophets, as any male Jew might be asked to do on any Sabbath, and he had chosen to read from Isaiah 61:1-2. "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor." At this point, however, he closed up the scroll and applied the prophecy, saying, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). This was a remarkable declaration, for it was nothing less than the claim that Isaiah had written of him and that he was fulfilling this prophecy.

With such an estimate of himself it is not surprising that Jesus called men and women to follow him. In fact, he commanded them to follow him, and then later dispatched them on a worldencompassing evangelistic ministry.

The impossibility of regarding Jesus merely as a good man is seen also in his claim to be able to forgive sins, not merely sins against himself but also against others. No mere man can forgive sins, no matter how good he is. In fact, as C. S. Lewis notes, "Unless the speaker is God, this is really so preposterous as to be comic." We do not have much difficulty in imagining how a person can forgive an offense against himself. If a person should hit you, you have a right to forgive him. "Don't mention it," you might say, particularly if he said he was sorry. If he steals from you, you can also forgive him. But suppose the person

should go around hitting other people, thousands of them, and stealing from them. In that case, you have no right to forgive him; and you should not regard highly anyone who thought he had this right. Yet this is precisely what Jesus did.

On one occasion, a paralyzed man was lowered into his presence from a hole cut in the roof of the house where he was teaching. Jesus said, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). On another occasion Jesus forgave a woman who was known to be a sinner in some open way. She had entered the house where Jesus was eating, wept so that her tears fell on his feet, and then wiped his feet with her hair. Jesus told her, "Your sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:48). On each occasion the onlookers objected, saying, "Who is this that forgives sins? Who can forgive sins but God only?" None of the observers was prepared to admit Christ's claim at this point, but at least they saw the issue clearly. How could he forgive sins? The claim was preposterous if he was not really God.

Finally, the impossibility of considering Jesus to be merely a good man is seen in the fact that on several occasions he openly claimed to be God. In the climate of the Judaism of his day this could not be done often or openly, for it was blasphemy and a capital offense. Nevertheless, there were times when Jesus allowed the issue to become clear.

For example, in the eighth chapter of John there is the record of a conversation between Jesus and the Jewish rulers over the relationship of Jews to Abraham. They thought they were saved because of their physical descent from Abraham. Jesus denied it. They became angry and attacked him personally. "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" they asked. Jesus answered, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58). This so offended those who heard him that they began to pick up stones to throw at him and kill him. They did this because they recognized the claim to divinity that Christ's words implied. At the least these words were a claim to preexistence; that is, Jesus claimed to have existed in the beginning with God before Abraham was created. In addition, however, they were also a claim to be God himself. For Christ's "I am" was the very name for God—Jehovah—which means, "I

am who I am" (Exod. 3:14). It was because of this claim that those who heard Jesus took up stones to kill him.

A second example of the same claim occurs when Jesus appeared to Thomas shortly after the Resurrection. Thomas had said that he would not believe in Jesus' resurrection unless he could put his finger in the nail prints of Jesus' hands and his hand into Jesus' side. But when Jesus appeared, Thomas did not insist on these tests. Instead, he fell at Jesus' feet, declaring, "My Lord and my God." What did Jesus do? Did he reply, as Paul and Barnabas did later in a similar situation, "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you" (Acts 14:15)? Not at all! He accepted the designation of this doubting apostle, adding, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

What are we to do with these claims? We cannot escape them. As John Stott observes, "The claims are there. They do not in themselves constitute evidence of deity. The claims may have been false. But some explanation of them must be found. We cannot any longer regard Jesus as simply a great teacher, if He was so grievously mistaken in one of the chief subjects of His teaching, namely Himself." In the same way C. S. Lewis has written, "You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

The Possibilities

I have said, then, that the one impossible explanation of the person of Jesus Christ is that he was a good man. But the quotation from C. S. Lewis has already begun to suggest the true possibilities. There are three of them.

First, if the unusual and egocentric claims of Jesus of Nazareth eliminate the possibility that he was merely a good man or an

exceptional teacher, they nevertheless do not eliminate the possibility that he may have been mad, or, if you will, that he was suffering from a severe case of megalomania. This is the view of those who in this chapter say, "You are demon-possessed" (v. 20). This has been the case with other men. Hitler suffered from megalomania. It is probable that Napoleon did too.

Perhaps Jesus was crazy or possessed. Before we jump too quickly at this explanation, however, we need to ask whether the total character of Jesus (as we know it) bears out this speculation. Did he act like one who was crazy? Did he speak like one suffering from megalomania? It is hard to read the Gospels and be satisfied with this explanation. Rather, it is hard to escape the conclusion that Jesus was actually the sanest man who ever lived. He spoke with quiet authority. He always seemed in control of the situation. He was never surprised or rattled. He just does not seem to fit our easy classifications.

There is another reason why Jesus cannot have been crazy. It is the reaction of others to him. Men and women did not merely tolerate Jesus; they either were for him or else violently against him. This is not the way we react to those who are crazy. We may be irritated by a madman's irrational behavior. We may ignore him. We may lock him up if his delusions are dangerous. But we do not kill him. Yet this is what men who did not want to follow him tried to do to Jesus.

The second possibility is that Jesus Christ was a deceiver—the view of some others (v. 12). That is, he was out to fool men deliberately. He wanted to be a big man; therefore he made messianic claims and deluded men and women into believing them. Before we settle on this answer, however, we need to be perfectly clear about all that is involved. In the first place, if Jesus really was a deceiver, he was certainly the *best* deceiver who ever lived. Jesus claimed to be God, but we must remember that this claim was not made in a Greek or Roman environment where the idea of many gods or even half-gods was acceptable. It was made at the heart of monotheistic Judaism. Nowhere else in the ancient world could one find a strict belief in one God, but this belief was present in Judea in Christ's century. Jews were ridiculed

for it. At times they were persecuted. Nevertheless, they stuck to this doctrine and were even fanatical in its defense. It was in this hostile theological climate that Christ made his claims. What happened? The remarkable thing is that he got people to believe in him. Lots of people—men and women, peasants and sophisticates, priests, even eventually members of his own family. So if Jesus was a deceiver, he was at least a good one. He was the best.

On the other hand, if Jesus was a deceiver, he was also the *worst* deceiver—so much so that he could be termed a devil if he were not God. Think it through clearly. Jesus did not merely say, "I am God," and then let it go at that. He said, "I am God come to save fallen humanity; I am the means of salvation; trust me with your life and your future." Jesus taught that God is holy and that we are barred from him because we are not holy. Our sin is a great barrier between ourselves and God. We cannot come into God's presence. Moreover, he taught that he had come to do something about our problem. He would die for our sin; he would bear our punishment. All who would trust in him would be saved. This is good news. It is even great news—but only if it is true. If it is not true, then we are of all men the most miserable and Jesus Christ should be hated as a fiend from hell. If it is not true, Jesus has condemned millions. He has sent generations of gullible followers to a hopeless eternity.

But has he? Is he a deceiver? Is this the only explanation that we can give of one who was known as being "meek and lowly"; who took the place of a poor itinerant evangelist in order that he might help the destitute and teach those whom others despised; who said, "Come unto me, all you who are weary and are burdened, and I will give you rest"? Somehow the facts do not fit. We cannot face the facts of his life and teaching and still call this man a deceiver. What then? Well, if he was not a deceiver and he was not mad, there is only one possibility left. Jesus is who he said he is. He is God, and we should follow him.

The Inescapable Christ

Do you believe that? I hope you do. Or, at least, I hope you are on the way to believing it. Who is Jesus Christ? The one thing you must try not to do is escape the question.

Some try to escape the question by running away. If you have been doing that, let me challenge you to be entirely honest with yourself on this question. You will not want to believe in Christ without evidence, but consider the evidence. Read one of the Gospels. Read it carefully and critically. Ask yourself: Is Jesus mad? Is he a deceiver? Is he God? And before you read, ask God to help you understand what is written. You do not even have to believe in God for certain.
Just pray, "God (if there is a God), I want you to know that I am an honest seeker after truth, and I want to understand who Jesus Christ is. I know that I cannot be impartial about so great an issue; therefore, I promise that if you show me that Jesus of Nazareth really is your Son and our Savior, I will obey and follow him." I assure you that if you will pray this prayer, God will lead you into his truth. Just a few verses farther on in John's Gospel the Lord himself declares this saying, "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching is from God or whether I speak on my own" (v. 17).

Finally, you may be one who is already intellectually convinced of the truth of Jesus' claims, yet you have not yet committed yourself to him and thus come to know him personally. If you are in this position, you should know that your position is untenable. Do not delay. Honesty demands a response, and divine love draws you to Jesus. Say, "Jesus, I have tried to go my own way until this time. I have tried to avoid you. I was wrong, and I will do so no longer. From now on I accept your death on my behalf. I promise to be your follower."

Chapter 92.
Man's Doctrine, God's Doctrine

John 7:14-18

We come in this chapter to a second important question raised about the Lord Jesus Christ. The first question, which we looked at in the last study, concerned his person. It was expressed in the form: "Who is he?" In answering that question we saw that Jesus of Nazareth cannot be either a good man, a deceiver, or crazy. Hence, he must be God. The second question concerns his teaching: "Is it true? Can it be trusted?" This question was raised by Christ's contemporaries.

"Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews were amazed and asked, 'How did this man get such learning without having studied?' Jesus answered, 'My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him" (7:14-18). We realize from these verses that so long as Jesus was hidden from the crowds, as he was for the first half of the feast, the questions of the people concerned him personally. However, when he suddenly appeared and began to teach, the questions shifted from who he was to what he was saying. These were marvelous teachings. The people had never heard anything like them. They were coming from one who had never received formal training in the rabbinical schools.

"Where did he get this teaching?" Hidden within their question was the deeper question as to whether or not anything so radical and new could be trusted. We see the importance of this question when we realize that many persons ask it today when they hear true Christian teaching for the first time.

Not of Human Origin

It is interesting to note how Christ replied, for his reply stressed the enormous gulf that exists between all human teaching and that which is divine in origin. If we had been in this situation, we might have been inclined to stress our own originality, which, in a sense, Jesus himself might have done. However, if he had done that—if he had said that he

was self-taught or that he needed no teacher—he would have been discredited at once. For no one in Christ's age prized originality. The rabbis taught by quoting other rabbis, particularly those who had lived before them. The Jewish Talmud today is composed largely of such rabbinic quotations. So Jesus did not do that. Instead, when he was questioned about it he replied, not by denying the need for external authority but by citing the highest authority of all. "My teaching is not my own," he said. "It comes from him who sent me." The tradition out of which Jesus spoke was God's.

This being true, however, it follows that there is an enormous gulf between human traditions and the revelation of God: in other words, between man's doctrine and God's doctrine. These are not the same. They are not even variations of the same basic principles. They are opposed.

Consequently, in all spiritual things we need revelation. And we need to be suspicious of any teaching that originates in man.

Many Differences

God says, in speaking to men, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isa. 55:8). This is true, and it can be seen by comparing the teaching and views of the world with God's teaching on all the great spiritual issues.

Take the *doctrine of God* himself. What does the world think about God? Well, the world has differing views. Some of them have been cited by the English writer and Bible translator J. B. Phillips in the book *Your God Is Too Small.* There is God the Policeman, God the Parental Hangover, the Grand Old Man, God the Managing Director, and so on. If we turn to the books of philosophy, we find definitions that are more carefully constructed but no better. God is the Ideal. He is the Prime Mover. In more modern terms he is the author of the "big bang" that got the expanding universe expanding. Basic to all these ideas, however, is the thought that God is not particularly involved in life now or that, if he is, he is not particularly righteous or fair in the way he goes about it.

How different this is from the Christian view. According to the teaching of Jesus Christ, God is the holy and sovereign God of all eternity and all history. He planned the world from before its creation. He brought each thing into being according to a perfect plan. He sustains life now and guides history. He came in the person of his Son to redeem a fallen humanity. He constantly intervenes to save men and women as an expression of his grace. Moreover, he will one day conduct a righteous and final judgment.

We may also see the difference between the views of human beings and the truth of God in regard to the doctrine of *Scripture.* What is the Bible? Many will answer that the Bible is a record of man's seeking after God and of his views about God—if indeed they do not say something worse. But God tells us that the Bible is his word about man and to man in his lost condition. Is the Bible human in origin? If so, it is dispensable. Is it divine? If that is the case, it is the only sure foundation for us in a faltering universe.

Unfortunately, even Christians sometimes get off the track on Scripture. This is true of enthusiasts, for instance—those who feel that fervor is the important thing and that teachings do not matter. But they do matter. Those who think this way are a bit like a couple who bought a house shortly after World War II. Houses were not being built too well in those days, but this couple finally thought that they had found a good one. Besides, they noted, it had a fireplace. That was a rare thing in a new home then. The first night in the house was a chilly and windy night, so the husband decided to build a fire in the fireplace. He did, and they watched it burn. Suddenly the fire dropped through the floor into the basement, and when they examined the fireplace they discovered that it had no base. There was nothing for the fire to rest upon except the floor. There is similar waste and uselessness for anyone who attempts to kindle the fires of religious enthusiasm on any other base than the firm teachings and principles of the Word of God.

Man's doctrine and God's doctrine also differ where *man himself is* concerned. Man's doctrine rates man by man's standards, and by man's standard he is not too bad. At any rate, most people are not too bad, and

almost everyone can take comfort from the fact that he is better than someone else in something. If we were to express morality in inches, we would all acknowledge that there are Wilt Chamberlains as well as midgets, and take courage from the fact that we are (at least in our own opinion) somewhat above the average.

But God does not look at man from man's perspective. He looks from his perspective, and from that point of view all persons fall woefully short of his requirements. To return to the illustration of physical height, it is as though God were looking down on us from the top of the Empire State Building in New York. Down on Thirty-eighth Street people might be four, five, or six feet tall and that might seem important. But from God's perspective they all seem like midgets. The Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

If you doubt God's verdict upon you and question his evaluation of your character, you need to present your case before the bar of Scripture. Study the law. I am convinced that if you do you will accept yourself after the examination as being far more sinful than you previously imagined.

Sometime ago a San Francisco policeman stopped a car for having a noisy muffler. He found that it was not registered. When he called up the warrants bureau he found that there were fiftynine parking violations registered against the car and that the total charges were $1,217. Finally, he also learned that the driver was the son of Joseph Alioto, the mayor of the city. When word of the unpaid tickets reached the mayor he exploded, but he also ordered a check on the rest of his family. Imagine his surprise when he learned that eight different Aliotos —including the mayor himself, his wife, and four of his sons—owed $422 on twenty-two separate violations. He paid them. In the same way the law exposes our sin and teaches us our true standing before God.

The differences between human opinions concerning the *Lord Jesus Christ* and the Father's teaching about him are another example. The present chapter of John's Gospel is full of such human opinions. We find some calling Jesus "a good man" (v. 12). This is the most

impossible view of all. Some called Christ a "deceiver" (v. 12). Others were willing to call him a "prophet" (v. 40). Some said he was possessed by a demon, another way of saying that he was crazy (v. 20). Some felt that he was very courageous (v. 26) and that he was what we would call a "spellbinder" (v. 46). The truth of the matter is that Jesus is God.

We turn to the *death of Jesus Christ,* and we find the same variation. Some say that the cross was a tragedy; others, an example of brave suffering. The Bible teaches that the cross was the place of vicarious sacrifice, that Jesus died there for sinful men, and that from before the foundation of the world this great sacrifice was planned as the means by which God would save those whom he had previously determined to save.

You say, "But that is hard to understand and accept." You are right, and that is the whole point. These things are hard to understand and accept. But for that reason God has taken time to explain them. It is why, in the case of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God the Father began to teach about it back in Old Testament times. The Jewish people were no more prone to accept the idea of vicarious sacrifice than we are. But God used the animal sacrifices, which he established and regulated, to teach that one day the perfect Lamb, his Son, would come and die for the sin of the world.

Finally, we think of *judgment*, and we find that men scoff at it. "The only hell we shall ever know is the hell we make for ourselves on this earth," they argue. But the Bible says, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31). Can you dismiss this doctrine? Must you not rather receive it as the teaching of Christ and of the whole Word of God?

No Satisfaction

The tremendous difference that exists between man's doctrine and God's doctrine leads to a few conclusions.

First, it is only God's doctrine that satisfies. There is no comfort in the speculations of men, at least not in the moments of crisis. If we can be shaken, that which is the product of our minds or hands can be shaken also. The story is told of a Roman Catholic sculptor who lived in Europe years ago. He was dying, and so was visited by his priest. The priest talked to him and then, seeing how ill he was, prepared to give him final unction. "You are dying," he said. He held up a beautiful crucifix. "Look upon your God, who died for you."

The sculptor looked and then cried out, "Alas for me; I made it." There is no satisfaction in that which is the fruit of our own hands. Human theories will not satisfy in the hour of death. Only divine truth will stabilize.

Satisfaction

The second conclusion is that we can be sure of God's doctrine even though it is strange to us.
How? Jesus told how in these verses, showing that the key is to be found in a willingness to obey God and follow in the direction that true doctrine leads, even before we know what it is. He said, "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching is from God or whether I speak on my own" (v. 17). God does not give assurance in spiritual things merely to satisfy curiosity. He does not teach divine truth to those who will not live by it. However, if a man determines in advance that he will live by it—that he is serious with God—then God will disclose the truths of his Word to him. In particular, he will disclose the truth concerning the Lord Jesus Christ to those who determine that they will follow him.

Harry Ironside tells of a young man who did that. He was a cowboy out in Arizona, and he had gotten away from God. For years he had ridiculed and rejected the Bible. But at last, when he was under deep conviction of sin, someone said, "Why don't you just go to God yourself

and ask him to make it clear to you?" He took these words to heart. One night by the side of his bed he knelt and prayed, "O God, if there is a God and if you can look down on a poor lost sinner like me and if you can hear my prayer, if Jesus Christ is your Son, reveal this to me; for if you do, I promise that I will serve you for the rest of my days." The cowboy then began to search the Bible. Afterward he said that, although he could not explain it, a change took place and within three days he knew beyond a doubt that the Lord Jesus Christ was indeed the Son of God and his Savior. This man became a faithful servant of the Lord for many years, until God finally took him home to heaven.

If you say, "But I can't believe the Bible," I will tell you why you cannot. You have not yet determined to go the way God's truth leads. However, once you determine to go God's way, you will know these things are true. What will it be for you—God's doctrine or the doctrines of human beings? Will it be truth or error? Make truth your guest. God's truth is the best of all guests. Entertain it, and it will bless you as Abraham was blessed by the visiting angels.

Chapter 93.
Judging by Right Judgment

John 7:19-24

The fundamental spiritual error of the human heart is to think that a person can please God by his own natural efforts. But this error leads to others. It leads to errors in estimating the person and work of Christ, for example. If we are doing all right by our own efforts, or think we are, then we think that we are obviously not much different from Christ himself and certainly do not need a Savior. It also leads to errors concerning the law of God. We are encouraged to believe that the law was given to be followed as a way of salvation—which is nowhere taught in the Bible— rather than as a standard that is meant to condemn

sinners and to drive the one who feels its condemnation to the Lord Jesus Christ.

This latter error—the error of thinking that the law was given to be kept as a way of salvation— lies behind the following story.

Christ in Judea

For a number of months, perhaps for the better part of a year, the Lord Jesus Christ had been carrying on a ministry in Galilee. Galilee was north of Judea, and, more than that, it was divided from it by the entirely different and independent land of Samaria. Therefore, what Jesus did in the north was of relatively little concern to the rulers of Judea. After the turning of public opinion in the north, however, and as the time of his prophesied crucifixion grew closer, Jesus returned to Jerusalem and thus at once plunged into the midst of the hostility of the authorities.

What Jesus had done in the north was not really much in the minds of these religious leaders. But there was not one of them who had forgotten that on his last visit to Jerusalem a year before, Jesus had violated their understanding of the sabbath by healing a paralyzed man. That was work, according to their understanding. The law said, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates" (Exod. 20:810). If Jesus could do such things on the sabbath, he was obviously dangerous. He was a sinner, and he was teaching others to sin. At the time of this miracle the leaders had, therefore, tried to kill him. Jesus had escaped. But he had now returned, and they remembered.

The common people as a whole did not recognize this malignant hatred on the part of their leaders. Jesus did, but they did not. Consequently, they did not understand why Jesus was speaking as he was in answering these leaders. Some of the ambiguities of the conversation vanish when

we recognize this. Moreover, the purpose of the law becomes clear for us also. For Jesus told why God gave the law at the same time that he was teaching both what are the right and wrong attitudes men hold toward it.

This becomes personal for us, particularly toward the end of Christ's conversation with the people and leaders. For Jesus concluded, "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment" (v. 24). To be sure that we do judge rightly, particularly where the law is concerned, we need to pay close attention to Christ's statements.

The Law Condemns

The first statement that the Lord Jesus Christ made was that anyone trusting in the law will be condemned by the law, for no one keeps it perfectly. I know that this is somewhat veiled in this specific conversation, due to the fact that Christ was speaking directly to those men who hated him. Yet this is the general teaching. Jesus said, "Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?" (v. 19). Would these men make the law their standard? Well, then, the law would condemn them. They would use the law to attempt to prove that Jesus Christ was a sinner, but even while they were doing it the law would condemn them for their hatred and murderous designs.

The law always does that. It condemns. Someone said to me once that you should never point a finger at someone else and say, "He is responsible." For every time you point a finger at another you have three fingers pointing at yourself. Will you attempt to find another guilty before God's righteous standards? You yourself are condemned. Will you attempt to live by the law? The law will pronounce its judgment upon you.

We find a great illustration of this from an incident in the life of King David. David had sinned in committing adultery with Bathsheba and then in having her husband killed. So God sent the prophet Nathan to the king. Nathan told the king this story. "There were two men in a

city," he said, "one rich and the other poor. The poor man had nothing except one ewe lamb, which he had raised as a member of his family. The children played with it, and it ate from his own table. It was almost like a daughter to him. The rich man, on the other hand, had many sheep. One day, when a traveler came to the rich man, the man who had much was not willing to take one of his own flock to prepare it for the traveler but rather took the poor man's lamb and served it to his visitor." David became terribly angry, too angry, in fact. He said, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die!" Nathan allowed David to finish his speech, and then told him that David was the man. What does the law do? The law condemns. It shows that we have violated it. Thus, there can never be hope of salvation by observing the law.

There is another reason for this also. The reason is seen in the nature of God's law, which is to demand perfection. The law says, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law" (Gal. 3:10; cf. Deut. 27:26). If salvation could come by any law, it would come by God's law. God's law is perfect. But no one keeps it. Hence, its very perfection condemns us. Christ's first point was an important one. Anyone trusting in the law will be condemned by the law. If we are to be saved, salvation must come by a different road entirely.

Second, Jesus showed that trusting in the law makes one a hypocrite. For the legalist will condemn in another what he excuses in himself. Here were Jewish leaders condemning Christ for healing a man on the sabbath, but they were refusing to see that they themselves did things that basically were no different. Jesus revealed this in regard to their enactment of the rite of circumcision.

His argument went something like this. It was the law of the Old Testament that a male child should be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth (Lev. 12:3). Naturally, the eighth day would often fall on the sabbath. But it was the teaching of the rabbis, recorded in the Mishnah, that "everything necessary for circumcision" could be done on the sabbath day. "Well," said Jesus, "don't you see what you are doing?

You say that you fully observe the law that was given to you through Moses, including the laws concerning the sabbath. The laws of the sabbath forbid work, and you have interpreted that to mean every kind of activity except that which is absolutely necessary to save life. Technically, this should exclude circumcision. Yet you permit it, and it is right that you do. Moreover, notice that circumcision is a form of mutilation. How hypocritical then for you to blame me for curing a man's body, making it whole, when you for the sake of religion actually mutilate it on the seventh day!"

This is an unusually intricate argument, suited to the particular type of hypocrisy prevalent in Christ's time, but the principle is no less true for ours. Legalism gives birth to hypocrisy. So for this reason also law cannot be the basis for a saving relationship to God Almighty. Besides, it makes men hard. Had the Jewish leaders understood the implications of the Mosaic provision for circumcision on the sabbath "they would have seen that deeds of mercy such as he had just done were not merely permissible but obligatory" for men, as Morris indicates. **The Use of the Law**

At this point, then, we have come to the end of Christ's specific teachings about the law in John 6. But we are still left with a question. If no one can be saved by the law and if trying to live by law actually tends to make one a hypocrite, why then did God give the law? Did God give the law to condemn? Does God take delight in the law's verdict upon sinful humanity? The answer is that the law was given to point men and women to Christ. The law was not given with the thought that anyone would ever keep it as a way of salvation. The law was a standard given in order to convince men of their true and hopeless condition so that they might turn from their own efforts at salvation and come to God for grace.

The law can be compared to a mirror. The function of a mirror is to show you your face and, if your face is dirty, to show you that it is dirty. The purpose of a mirror is not to wash your face. Imagine a person coming into the house after a hard day's work, looking in a mirror, and

discovering that his face is dirty. Then imagine him taking the mirror off the wall and attempting to wash his face with it. How ridiculous! Yes, but it is no more ridiculous than the folly of a man who thinks that he can be made righteous by the law's righteous standards. The purpose of the mirror is to drive one to the soap and water. Similarly, the function of the law is to drive the one who discovers his sin by means of the law to Christ.

But how could he know about Christ? Particularly, how could a Jew living in Old Testament times know that there was to be a Savior? The answer is that at the same time God gave the law, he also gave the instructions concerning the sacrifices. At the same time that he gave Moses, he also gave Aaron, who was the high priest.

It is as though God in the same moment in which he declared, "Thou shalt not," also went on to say, "But I know you will, and so this is the way to get out of it."

Nearly all the sacrifices prescribed in the Old Testament point to Christ, of course. But the meaning of the sacrifice is made particularly clear in two sacrifices always performed in Israel on the Day of Atonement. The first sacrifice was that of a goat that was driven away into the wilderness to die there. This goat was brought to Aaron or to those high priests who followed him. The high priest placed his hands on the head of the goat, thereby identifying himself and the people with it. He then confessed the people's sins, symbolically transferring them to the goat, which was then driven out into the wilderness. The text says, "The goat will carry on itself all their sins" (Lev. 16:22).

The other sacrifice was the sacrifice made in the courtyard of the temple. After making a sacrifice for himself, Aaron was to take another goat, kill it, and then bring its blood into the Holy of Holies where it was to be placed upon the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant beneath the wings of the cherubim. All this was symbolic. The ark contained the stone tablets of the law of Moses, which were broken. The space between the outstretched wings of the cherubim represented the presence of God. Without the blood of the innocent substitute the

picture is one of stern judgment and inevitable condemnation. God looks down upon the law that all men have broken. The broken law calls for death. But then, the blood of the goat is placed between God's presence and the law, and God's wrath is averted. Death has occurred. Sin has been punished. Now God looks in grace upon the sinner.

I do not know how much of the great plan of salvation concerning the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ most of those living before his time understood. Some undoubtedly understood much; others, little. But I do know this: The sacrifices were given to show the way in which salvation was to come, so that when a person despaired of finding salvation by means of the law he might look for a Savior.

Jesus Christ is that Savior. He bore your sin upon himself, if you are one whom the Father has given to him. He carried away your sin, as the scapegoat carried away the sins of the nation. He intervened between the wrath of God and the law that you have broken, as the blood of the sacrifice intervened on the Day of Atonement. He died for you. He died that you might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21).

We sing it in many of our hymns.

> What can wash away my sin?
> Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
> What can make me whole
> again? Nothing but the
> blood of Jesus.
> O precious is the flow
> That makes me white as snow;
> No other fount I know,
> Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Or again:

> Not the labors of my hands
> Can fulfill thy law's demands;
> Could my zeal no respite know,

Could my tears forever flow, All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and thou alone. Rock of ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in thee.

Cleansed from Sin

Many years ago, toward the end of the twelfth century, Scotland's great king Robert the Bruce was being chased by English soldiers. They were almost upon him, so when he realized that he was not making the speed he should he left the path and darted through the moorlands and thick forest, hoping to escape. Robert ran mile after mile. But then, just as he was telling himself that perhaps at last he had escaped the vengeance of King Edward, he heard a sound that made his blood run cold. It was the baying of his own bloodhounds. He knew that the English, fearing that they would lose him in the thicket, had let loose his own bloodhounds, putting them on his track. The animals that were supposed to protect their master faithfully were actually serving the English by running him down. Robert knew that it was all over for him unless he could succeed in putting something between himself and the hounds that might throw off his scent. Desperate now and exhausted, he stumbled on until suddenly he came to a clear mountain brook. At once he plunged in, allowed it to sweep him a mile or two downstream, and then came out on the other side of the forest, where he hid and listened as the hounds came up to the water and were able to go no farther. The scent was gone. The king had escaped from his enemies.

You can easily see the application. The law, which is supposed to do us good, actually serves to our hurt and betrays us. We are lost unless we plunge into that one stream that will wash out the scent of sin forever.

Jesus is that stream. Will you come to him? Will you drink of him? Will you allow his blood to cleanse you?

Chapter 94.
Who Has Done More Than Jesus?

John 7:25-31

It is a good thing to ask questions. But there is no point in asking questions unless what we ask leads to answers. Only a fool or a child asks questions just to ask questions. In the verses in John to which we now come there are three questions, each asked by a group of persons who had witnessed a part of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Each of these is important; in fact, one of them is terribly important. Yet not one is answered. We turn, therefore, to the questions, not for the questions themselves but for the answers and, in particular, so that we may arrive at the all-important answer to that question that concerns our own personal estimate of the Lord Jesus Christ and our relationship to him.

Three Questions

The first question is found in verse 25. It is asked by a group of people who were knowledgeable about affairs in Jerusalem. Most of the people did not know of the hostility directed against Jesus by the religious leaders; but some did know of it, and these were puzzled by the fact that Jesus apparently was allowed to go on teaching. Their question was: "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill?" John does not give the answer to this question, but the answer is obvious. "Yes, it is!" Since Jesus is the sinless Son of God, this answer tells us much about the corruption of the human heart.

The second question follows immediately upon the first one as the result of a kind of reasoning by those who had asked it. "Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ?" (v. 26). The answer

was, "No, they have not"—and that is because they did not wish to know. This answer exposes the truly lost condition of men and women, for none are so blind as those who will not see, or deaf, who will not hear.

Finally, there is a question by another group who, we are told, actually believed in Jesus. Their question deals with Christ's actions and is expressed as follows: "When Christ [that is, the Messiah] comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?" (v. 31). The answer at this point, although John once again does not give it explicitly, is: "No, he will not." Consequently, the conclusion must be that Jesus is the Christ, and that we should believe on him as the Savior.

Do you believe on him? Is he your Savior? If not, you must ask yourself this question: When the Messiah comes, will he do more—could he do more—than Jesus?

Christ and the Scriptures

Let me help you a bit with your answer, and let me do so by bringing to mind some of the things that Jesus has done. First, *Jesus alone has fulfilled the Scriptures.* This is his own teaching. He said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17).

It is also confirmed by observation. Toward the end of the brilliant ministry of John the Baptist, after he had been thrown into prison, John's spirits sagged. The time came when he sent friends to Jesus to ask whether Jesus was indeed the Messiah or whether he and his followers should look for another. Jesus did not answer directly but instead sent back a quotation from Isaiah in which he detailed the accomplishments of his ministry. He said, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me" (Matt. 11:4-6). Jesus' claim was based on an appeal to the Scriptures, and his point was that he alone was fulfilling

them. In time, as we know, he fulfilled them completely, even to the point of the prophecies concerning the specific details of his death and resurrection.

When the Messiah comes, will he do more to fulfill the detailed prophecies of the Old Testament than Jesus has done?

Jesus Is God

Second, because of fulfilling the Scriptures and for other reasons, *Jesus has convinced millions that he is God manifest in human flesh* and that he alone has answers to the deep problems of life.

We must not think that believing in an incarnate God came easy to Christ's contemporaries while it is hard for us today. It may have been easy for Greeks or Romans, for much of their mythology contained similar ideas. But it was not easy for Jesus' Jewish contemporaries, and it was among orthodox Jews that the gospel first gained a foothold. Here were people who had been raised in a culture based upon centuries of ardent monotheism. They declared in their synagogues, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one LORD" (Deut. 6:4). They abhorred the polytheism of the gentile cultures of the day. Yet, through talking with Jesus and through observing him as he went about the countryside teaching and doing good, these men came to believe that he was more than man, that he was God incarnate. Many of them later died as martyrs rather than renounce that belief. Peter declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Thomas called him "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Paul wrote that he was "declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4).

It is the same today. Millions confess Jesus to be the One whom he claimed to be. Centuries separate us from the time in which Jesus Christ lived and carried on his ministry. The weight of secular opinion, steeped as it is in skepticism, is against the conclusion that Jesus is God. Yet Jesus has spoken to us and convinced those of us who have studied his

life and been moved by it that he is God and that he has the answers to life. Who else has convinced millions of this truth, as Jesus has done?

When the Messiah comes, will he convince more people of his godhead than have already been convinced by Jesus?

A Social Revolution

Third, Jesus has launched *the only great and lasting social changes the world has ever seen.* That is a categorical statement, but it is justified. At the time of Christ's coming the world was a place of great cruelty and horror. Slavery was universally practiced and accepted. Gladiatorial contests brought literal death before the eyes of millions for amusement. Unwanted children were exposed upon the hillsides to die. Pride divided the free man from the slave, Jew from Gentile, man from woman, Roman from Greek. It was a barbarous age, as Fellini has so well depicted in his *Satyricon* and *Roma* and as the historians of the time have reported.

But Jesus changed that. He came, not with a social program alone, but with a new ethic founded upon a new life that was his life within all who should follow him. The change did not happen at once. In the early years, the preachers of the gospel were fortunate if they were given an opportunity just to preach the gospel. But, in time, the life of the risen Lord took hold of at least some people, and a number of others, even those who were not Christians, responded.

The greatest changes took place during the reigns of the emperors Constantine and Justinian. Cruel sports, such as those of the arena, were checked, for Christians opposed them. Laws came into being that protected the slave. He could no longer be branded as a sign of ownership, for instance. He could no longer be killed at the whim of his owner. Children were given legal rights that they had never before possessed. Hospitals and orphanages came into being. At times the progress was slow. There were setbacks. The Middle Ages were in some ways a return to barbarism. Those who went by the name of Christian often did non-Christian things. Still, at the time of the

recovery of the gospel during the Reformation period, the social conscience of Christianity was found not to be lost. So we find Zwingli instituting social reforms at Zurich, and Calvin creating jobs for the thousands of refugees who thronged the streets of Geneva.

Zwingli transformed the preacher's monastery into a poorhouse where food was dispensed each day to those who wanted it. Begging was abolished. Apprentices were subsidized. Poor children were clothed. The register in which the rules were recorded regarding the care of beggars still exists; and the inscription at the top of the page begins, "Be merciful, says the Lord, as your Father in heaven is merciful."

Please do not misunderstand me. I do not mean to say by this rehearsal of history that nonChristians have never done a charitable deed, still less that Christians have always done them. In ancient times there were acts of charity practiced by some individuals. In our day much is done by non-Christians in proper imitation of Christian standards. But Jesus is the starting point nonetheless. He alone has inspired men, not only to do, but to persevere in the doing of that which we call social concerns and actions.

When the Messiah comes, will he bring about greater social changes than those occasioned by Jesus?

The Emancipator

Fourth, *Jesus has liberated the souls of millions.* When Jesus was on earth, at the beginning of his ministry on one occasion he entered the synagogue at Nazareth where he had been brought up and was asked to read the Old Testament lesson. He took the scroll of Isaiah and began to read from the sixty-first chapter. He read: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). He then declared, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21).

In this Old Testament quotation two phrases speak of emancipation: "to preach deliverance to the captives" and "to set at liberty them that are bruised." This was one of the most important parts of Christ's ministry. In Christ's day men and women were in physical bondage, but an even greater truth is that in his day, as in ours, many more were in spiritual bondage. They were bound by sin. Never more than one-half or two-thirds of the people on earth have ever been held in physical slavery at any one time. But all men at all times have been held captive by sin. Jesus has set millions free. Some were held down by drink, but Christ freed them. Others were enslaved by drugs, but Jesus broke those shackles. He has freed men of pride, arrogance, selfishness, and thousands of other debilitating things.

Has he done that for you? Or are you still caught in something from which you cannot free yourself? He can free you. Above all, he can liberate your soul. Charles Wesley wrote a magnificent verse of a great hymn about it. The stanza goes:

> Long my imprisoned spirit lay
> Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
> Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
> I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
> My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

When the Messiah comes, will he provide us with a greater measure of true spiritual freedom than Jesus provides for those who come to him?

Healer of Broken Hearts

Finally, there is a phrase in these verses that points to *Jesus as the healer of broken hearts.* He said that God sent him "to heal the brokenhearted," and this he has done.

We do not often talk about broken hearts, for the subject is much too personal. Yet there are broken hearts, millions of them. They are all

around us, and we often are touched in this way ourselves. There is no one who is exempt. I talk to men whose wives have been unfaithful to them. Sometimes they are in the ministry. I talk to women who have lost their husbands to other women, but who still love their husbands. Some have had their hearts broken by, death or by the fact that their children have left home and have to all appearances rejected Christ and Christianity. Some have failed in life. Some are homeless. These are the heartbreaks of human existence; and if Jesus Christ does not have the answer, there is just no answer.

But there is an answer, of course, and he has it. Jesus said that God sent him to heal the brokenhearted. Will Jesus Christ fail? Abraham succeeded in the task that God gave him. Moses succeeded. So did David and all the rest. Is Jesus Christ only to fail? Not at all. He has done what the Father sent him to do in millions of cases, and he is still doing it today. Heartbreak may be all too real, but those who have known Christ's love and power have been able to go on with their lives, rejoicing in him. Horatius Bonar sang,

> I have no help but thine, nor
> do I need Another arm save
> thine to lean upon:
> It is enough, my Lord, enough indeed;
> My strength is in thy might, thy might alone.

Jesus heals broken hearts. When the Messiah comes, will he heal more hearts than Jesus?

Come to Jesus

At the time of the Civil War in America a young man still in his teens was court-martialed by the Union Army and sentenced to be shot. He had gone to the war before he had to, because his friend had gone, and in friendship he had been willing to stand guard one night while his friend was somewhere else. Unfortunately, he had been on duty himself the night before; so, having been awake for two nights, he could not resist drowsiness and fell asleep at his post. For this he was sentenced to death.

When news of what had happened reached the boy's parents in New England their hearts were broken. To think that their only and beloved son should be shot! The boy's sister, a little girl who had read the life of Lincoln and knew from her reading how much he loved his own children, said, "If Abraham Lincoln knew how my father and mother loved my brother, he would not let him be shot." She determined that she would see the President. Security was not so strict in those days as it is today. So when the little girl reached the White House and told her story to the sentinel on duty, he was touched by her imploring looks, and passed her in. Mr. Lincoln's private secretary did the same thing. She was ushered into Lincoln's office and found herself in the company of Lincoln and his generals. The little girl told her simple story, stressing the grief of her parents. Lincoln was touched. He then wrote out a dispatch canceling the sentence and paroling the boy so he could return home to his father and mother.

This is a story of how a mere man can be moved by compassion. But it makes the point that if a man can be so moved, how much more compassionate and ready to heal hearts is Jesus Christ, who is more than man. Bring your need to him. Accept the comfort he can give you. And learn, as countless others have learned, that there is no one who can do more than Jesus.

Chapter 95.
"Where I Am, You Cannot Come"

John 7:32-36

It is impossible to read the first seven chapters of John's Gospel without becoming aware of the hostility that was building up against Jesus Christ on the part of the religious leaders and without beginning to anticipate the nature of the conflict that was to come. At the beginning of the Gospel we are warned that although Jesus came unto his own people, nevertheless "his own did not receive him" (1:11). Later we are

told that the leaders of the nation repeatedly schemed to kill him. Up to this point, however, nothing overt has been done against Jesus. Now this changes, for an attempt is made to arrest him. John writes that when "the Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him ... the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him" (7:32).

It is a strange mixture of good and evil, of light and shadow that we find in this chapter. On the one hand, we learn of a favorable response toward Christ by some of the people; this response precipitated the Pharisees' action. On the other hand, we hear of an official attempt at suppression. Here we see the Pharisees and chief priests—the phrase generally denotes the official body of the Sanhedrin in John's Gospel—sitting in judgment on Jesus. In the following verses we see one of their own number, Nicodemus, defending him. Even the attempted arrest presents the same ambiguity. For although in this section we see the officers dispatched to arrest Jesus, in just a little while we find them returning with the task unfinished. "Why didn't you bring him in?" they are asked.

The officers reply, "No one ever spoke the way this man does."

What is the situation at this point? It is an awakening of belief by some, accompanied on the part of others by the most intense hatred. In this situation it is of great value to study the response of the Lord Jesus Christ to his adversaries, for his response can help us when we are confronted by similar situations.

The most important verses are 33 and 34. Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come."

"I Am with You"

There are many lessons that can be drawn from this response, but the first, and certainly one of the most valuable, is that the servant of God cannot be held back from his work or be killed before he has completed that which God has given him to do. Thus Jesus replies, first of all, that

regardless of what they may try to do he will be with them "only a short time."

It would not be a great while, of course. It was only to be six months—the period between the
Feast of Tabernacles in the fall of the year, around which these remarks are dated, and the Passover at which Christ would be crucified in the spring. Still, so long as those six months had not passed, no one could take him. His hour, as the evangelist says in verse 30, had not come.

It is the same today. Luther, who faced similar problems in his time, wrote on these verses: "Who is Christ's protector? Who fends off his enemies? No one.... Nothing is said about many thousands of mounted soldiers or about thirty thousand foot soldiers who defended him. No, his entire armor is a little hour granted him until his crucifixion. That hour was not yet at hand, and since it was not, all the designs of his enemies against him were futile." Luther then concludes by noting that it will be so always. Nothing can touch the Christian unless it coincides with God's explicit command and order.

This includes even the hatred and schemes of the devil. Let me illustrate this by one of the great stories of the Bible.

Back in the Old Testament, just before the Book of the Psalms, there is the story of Job, a man whom we would classify as a rich but otherwise insignificant gentleman farmer but who becomes great in spiritual things because of what God allowed to transpire in his life. God allowed a great struggle brought on by the assaults of Satan. Yet God only allowed it because he knew in advance that through the strength that he would give to him, his servant Job would triumph. The point of the story in which we are most interested is that Satan was unable to do anything to Job until God first permitted it and even then it was permitted only because God knew that Job would be the victor. In other words, the story is an illustration of 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But

when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

God's Hedge

The Bible tells us that Job lived in the land of Uz and that he was fairly prosperous, though not by the standards of a very wealthy landowner or rancher in our time. His inventory was 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 donkeys. Besides this, there were all the necessary servants for such a household. Job also had seven sons and three daughters. The Bible tells us that Job was "blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1).

The day came, however, when the sons of God with Satan in their midst came to present themselves before the Lord. God initiated the conversation, directing his initial question to Satan: "Where have you come from?" Satan replied that he had been going to and fro in the earth and had been walking up and down in it.

Then came the important question: "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil" (1:8). The question is important because it indicates that the sufferings of Job began not only by God's permission, which Satan certainly needed to have, but also by God's direction. For it was God and not Satan who brought Job into the conversation.

Satan had undoubtedly heard of Job. Perhaps a lesser demon had brought Job to his attention, or perhaps Satan had even investigated Job himself. We do not know the details. All we know is that Satan did know of Job by the time God asked the question. For when God asked, "Have you considered my servantjob?" Satan immediately replied, "Does Job fear God for nothing? ...Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?" (1:9-10). He added, "But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face" (1:11).

The last part of this reply was untrue, of course, as the story shows. For Job did not curse God even when his substance was taken from him. Nevertheless, we must note that the first part was true and that it contained a great admission. Satan imputed the wrong motives to Job, to be sure. He implied that Job served God only because God protected him. But the true part—the interesting part—is that God had been protecting Job. Satan admits it. In other words, by admitting that God had placed a hedge about Job, Satan was also admitting that either he or one of his minions (or many of them) had been attacking Job but had been unsuccessful because of the protecting shield that God throws about all those who have put their trust in his grace.

Satan would pass over the hedge if he could. But he cannot. He would make the righteous fall if it were possible. But it is not. We see how God later shielded the people of Israel against the Egyptians, David against Saul, Peter against Herod, and the Lord Jesus Christ against all who would have sought to have hindered his ministry in any way contrary to the Father's will. In the same way we are protected.

The Assaults of Satan

Satan admitted that he could not touch Job, but he also made the accusation that Job remained faithful to God only because of that fact. So with great brevity God replies that in order to make the matter clear and to prove that Satan's accusation is untrue, he will lower the hedge. He will not remove it completely. But he will lower it so that Satan may touch all that Job has, excepting his person.

Now the full force of Satan's wrath falls against this aging saint. A servant arrives to tell him that marauders have carried off his oxen and donkeys and that they have killed the servants who were attending them. Another comes with news that lightning has killed both the sheep and those attending them. A third servant tells him that bandits have stolen the camels and that those servants have died. Finally, a messenger arrives to say that a whirlwind struck the house in which his children were eating and that they were killed in an instant. No doubt Satan steps back, waiting for his prophecy that Job would curse God to

be fulfilled. But Job stands firm. He is filled with legitimate sorrow and great grief. But faith wards off the defeat that Satan is looking for. Instead of cursing, "Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart.
The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised'" (1:20-21). Job had triumphed, and God was vindicated.

Again the time came when the sons of God presented themselves before Jehovah, and the same questions were asked. "Where have you come from?"

"From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." This time the reply seems a bit evasive, for the heavenly host knew Satan had actually been in Job's backyard.

God continued, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he *still* maintains his integrity...."

Satan answered, "Skin for skin! ...A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face" (2:1-5). This was also untrue, of course, as were aspects of Satan's former challenge. But God permits the challenge, this time giving Satan permission to touch Job's body, but not to take his life. At once Satan leaves and inflicts Job with boils which, we read, covered him "from the soles of his feet to the top of his head." What happened? Once again Job stood firm in his faith. And he did not falter even though his wife turned against him and his friends began to give him worldly counsel.

God's Blessing

We get to the end of the story and find that God again blesses Job and doubles all that he had given to him previously. When his friends were speaking to him, trying to convince him that he must have been guilty

of some sin because of what had happened, Job replied to them argument by argument. But when at the last God spoke, Job remained silent. Job listened. Then he gave a great statement of faith and prayed for those friends who had given him bad counsel. At this point the Lord rescinded Satan's permit to attack Job and restored to him the outward marks of his favor. We are told, "After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10).

Incidentally, although it is extraneous to the point I have been making, we should not pass over the ending without noticing that it contains a lesson for all believers concerning their children. The lesson is that the children of believers can never be lost to them. For even if the children should die, the children are still theirs and will be reunited to them one day.

We see this truth by comparing the opening list of Job's family and possessions with the list that closes the book after God is said to have doubled them. Before, Job had owned 7,000 sheep; now there are 14,000. Before, there were 3,000 camels; now there are 6,000. Before, 500 each of yokes of oxen and donkeys; now, 1,000. But then we come to the list of children and find the numbers identical. Before, there were seven sons and three daughters; now there are seven sons and three daughters. Is something wrong? Not at all. It is merely God's way of saying that the original sons and daughters—unlike the animals, which did not possess immortal souls—were not lost to Job and that in the end he actually possessed fourteen sons and six daughters, though half of them were with God in glory. Thus it is for every Christian parent who has lost a child.

If you have lost a child, as Job did, never say that you once had a child but do not have one now. Say that you have a child and that he or she is in heaven.

Now Is the Time

This story has taken us far afield, but it has nevertheless illustrated the first great point of Christ's reply to his critics in Jerusalem. They were threatening to arrest him. He replies that nothing can touch him so long as he still has work to do. In other words, nothing can touch him (or ourselves) until it has first been filtered through the perfect and loving will of our heavenly Father. We are to take comfort in that and be strong in the work that has been entrusted to us.

There is one other lesson also. Jesus referred to himself by saying, "I am with you for only a short time." But then he went on to remind his hearers that although he would be with them for a short time, nevertheless, the day of God's grace for them would not last forever. "Then I go to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come." That was true in an obvious, historical way for Judaism. Christ was present among the Jews for three years. His three-year ministry was followed by a forty-year-ministry by those whom he had specifically chosen as apostles. But then Jerusalem fell to the Romans, and the Christians were scattered throughout the world to preach the gospel. In an ironic way they went to the persons mentioned in the question put by Christ's hearers: "Where does this man intend to go, that we cannot find him? Will he go to where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks?" (v. 35). When the Christians did go to the dispersed Jews and to the Greeks the day of national opportunity ended at least for a time for Judaism.

It will end also for Gentiles when God in his own time brings this age to its close. It might end for you tonight. What is the state of your commitment? Have you sought Jesus and found him? Have you entered into that deep security that commitment to him brings? I hope you have or else that you will make that commitment now. He loves you. He died for you. He wants you to live for him. The Bible says: "Seek the LORD while he may be found, call on him while he is near" (Isa. 55:6). It says, "I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

Chapter 96.
An Invitation and a Promise

John 7:37-39

During the course of a year each of us receives many invitations. Some of them are gladly received: invitations to a wedding of good friends, to an intimate dinner, to a concert, to an evening of quiet conversation. Other invitations are not so welcome, and we find ourselves asking, "Do I have to go there?" or, "How can I get out of responding to that one?" In this chapter we come to the most important and happy invitation you and I can ever receive, and the great promise that goes with it. It is in the words of Jesus. "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (7:37-38).

The Setting

By now we are acquainted with the setting in which these words, the last spoken by Jesus in this chapter, were uttered. Jesus had gone to the Feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem and had begun to preach. Most were astounded at his teaching and were asking themselves if this might indeed be the Messiah whom all were expecting. The rulers, on the other hand, only increased their hatred of him and schemed how they might have him arrested and removed. Within a short time this enmity would build to a climax and Christ would be crucified. Moreover, since many had come up to this feast from other places and would soon be going back while Jesus remained in Judea, many would be seeing Christ no more.

As a result of this situation we find a new intensity in Christ's teaching. We are told that it was now the last day of the eight-day feast; on the next day the crowds would be gone. We are told that the invitation was given as Christ "stood and said in a loud voice." Here is intensity of appeal and great simplicity. Here is the core of the gospel. Other occasions would remain for deeper teaching and for secondary matters.

But this was not the time for that. This was the time to touch men's souls and to draw them to Christ for salvation. It was now or never for many. So the invitation is given. "Do you have a thirst?" Christ asks them. "Do you want salvation? Then come; come to me. Here and here alone is where you can find it."

What a day this would be if we, unlike that great crowd of a former day, should all come to Jesus and drink from him freely! And why should we fail to come to him? May the living Spirit of our God accomplish that as we examine both the extent of Christ's invitation and the nature of the promise in this study.

A Great Invitation

We must appreciate the extent of Christ's invitation. On the one hand, it is as broad as humanity, for Jesus says, "If anyone...." As in his day, so also in ours—all are included in the invitation.

We get a sense of the breadth of this invitation when we think of the extent of that original
Jerusalem congregation. Who was there at the feast? Jews were there—Jews from every part of Palestine and from every part of the empire. Jews were always going to Jerusalem for these feasts. Moreover, Gentiles were there also—some no doubt as proselytes, others simply as interested bystanders. We have a feeling for the mixed nature of this multitude when we remember that on the day of Pentecost, as the result of Peter's preaching, Parthians, Medes,
Elamites, Libyans, Romans, Cretans, Arabians, and Greeks of Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, heard him. A similar situation would have existed on this earlier occasion. Yet we do not find Jesus limiting his offer. "If *anyone* is thirsty, let him come!" All may come. Today the same sound flows forth from every true Christian pulpit and from all who bear a faithful witness to Christ in our land.

Have you heard it? Have you listened to that great invitation? I wonder if you have noticed that in this verse Jesus does not even detail the

nature of the thirst. He might have been more specific. He once said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt. 5:6). He might have said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after goodness or purity or holiness; for they shall be filled." He could have said, "If anyone is thirsty for me, let him come and drink." But he was not specific. There were no limitations. Is there a thirst? Then come! You are the one to whom the Lord Jesus Christ is speaking.

You may say, "But I am thirsting for pleasure, and the pleasure I am seeking is not Christian." Very well. But if you want real pleasure, pleasure that lasts and that truly satisfies, you will find it in Christ and not in the direction you are going. The Bible says, "At thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11 KJV).

Someone else may say, "I am not concerned for pleasure; I am concerned for wealth. Will I find wealth in Jesus?" In your sense, no. But in a better sense, yes. The Bible says that if we become God's children, then we are heirs, "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). It also says, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit hs soul?" (Mark 8:36). Oh, that there might be men and women who thirst today, for even thirst after the wrong thing is better than apathy. Oh, that men and women might come to him!

In these words, then, there is an invitation as wide as humanity.

On the other hand, there is also a sense in which, sadly, the great scope of this text is realistically narrowed down. It is true that the Lord Jesus addressed the invitation to "anyone," but we can hardly miss the fact that he did so in the midst of a conditional sentence. He said, "If anyone is thirsty...." And that is as much as to admit that there may not be many.

I can imagine that at this point our Lord's eyes swept over the vast congregation listening to him. The expressions in the eyes that glanced back were like those of our day. Some showed callousness; some hatred —they were the ones intent on his destruction. Some showed indifference. Some eyes were blank and uncomprehending. All

preachers experience this. I never stand to preach the gospel but I am made aware of the fact that there are many who do not understand the gospel and who, even if they do understand it, will not receive the Savior. To such we preach soul-satisfaction. We share Christ's invitation. But they, although they are in the midst of a spiritual desert of their own making, will not drink from this fountain. We warn them of their danger, and they dismiss it lightly. We speak of the law's condemnation, and they laugh at such old-fashioned notions. The mass of men never thirsts after salvation. Do you thirst?

You say, "I do not know whether I do or not." Well, find out. Turn your eye inward and ask, "Is there no thirst within me? Am I not dissatisfied about something? Is there not some area of my life in which I am unfulfilled?" If you are such a one, then God has placed that hunger and thirst within you. Rejoice! And come to Jesus! He said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.... streams of living water will flow from within him."

Come to Me

I have already anticipated my next point, as you will see, for it has to do with directions. What are they? They are directions that point you to Jesus. Do not say, "But what am I to believe?

What doctrines must I accept?" That will come in time, but it is not the step for you to take now.

If you are thirsty, come to Jesus. He said, "Come to me."

Above all, do not make the mistake of coming to the church as an institution or become preoccupied with its rites and ceremonies. Ceremonies are intended to point you to Christ. If you look to them in themselves, they will deceive you.

This was true in Christ's day and is well illustrated by the procedures that were taking place at this season. There were eight days to the great Feast of Tabernacles, and on each day certain public ceremonies were enacted. All were intended to remind the people of God's provision for them during the days of their desert wandering and to point them

forward to the Messiah in whom they would all be fulfilled. On the eighth day, the day on which Jesus stood up and cried out this invitation, the ceremonies were particularly impressive. On that day the priests, accompanied by the worshipers, went outside the city to the pool of Siloam—the pool to which Jesus later sends the blind man. Here they filled golden pitchers with water. Then, returning to the city, they marched seven times around the altar and concluded by pouring the water from the pool upon it. Clearly, the ceremony reminded them of God's provision of water for the people during their forty years in the wilderness.

This was done on the last great day of the feast, as I have said; and it was against this background, perhaps at this very climactic moment, that the voice of Jesus rang out—"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me." The ceremonies had value in reminding the people of God's past provision. We must not scorn them. But they also pointed to Jesus as the One who truly satisfied. Hence, he called upon the people to turn from the ceremonies and come to him.

Have you done what Christ's invitation requires? It is expressed in two parts, and the parts are synonomous. That is, they reinforce and interpret each other. First, you are to "come." That is not hard, especially when the One to whom you are to come is so lovely. And it need not be lengthy, for Jesus has already taken the greatest part of the journey in coming to you. "Come" means to believe, to have faith in him, to commit yourself to him. Will you do that? I wrote earlier that you will get to the fullness of the doctrines by and by. But you should notice even now that if you come to Jesus, you will be coming to the One who came to this earth to redeem you, who died on the cross for your sin, and who then rose again and was glorified by God, his Father. The author of the Gospel has this full picture of the victorious Christ in view, for the next verse alludes to it in the remark that "Jesus was not yet glorified." Second, you are invited to "drink" from Christ, as you would from a fountain. All that has been said about coming applies to this word too, but drinking involves one further idea. It involves appropriation. That which you drink becomes a part of you. If it is

wholesome, it helps you grow. Thus does Christ want to become part of your life and personality.

Will you come? Will you drink? There is no other prescription for the thirst of the human soul. There is no other drink but Jesus. Do not delay in coming. You have not come before, and that was wrong. But you may come *now.* That is the great invitation.

A Great Promise

Finally, one should see that there is also a great promise. Jesus said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." Then he added, "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

I wonder if you would have written the verse that way if you had been speaking or if you were (humanly speaking) the author of John's Gospel. I rather doubt it. Is it not true that if you or I had been writing, we would have tended to say, "And if anyone comes to me and drinks, he will be satisfied; his thirst will be quenched"? Of course we would. But that is not the nature of this promise. It is not the fact that we will be satisfied that Christ mentions. It is rather that we will become the means by which others, in addition to ourselves, will be satisfied. This means that to be Christ-centered is not to be self-centered. It is to be others-centered. It is to be made a blessing.

Now it goes without saying that we ourselves will be satisfied. In fact, we must be satisfied. Here Christ is telling us that we shall be overflowing vessels, but no vessel was ever overflowing until it had first been filled. Of course, we must be filled if this is to happen. But the point is that, if we drink of him, our minds of necessity will not be on our own satisfaction, but rather on the satisfaction of others.

It is at this point that much of our present-day Christianity is found wanting. To hear most Christians talk you would think that the sole purpose of Christ's coming was to save them and to satisfy them. That is one purpose, of course. But that is not the way in which I find the Christian life described in my Bible. That kind of Christianity—when

not balanced by the truth we are considering—produces a shallow, experience-centered, introverted, and eventually selfish approach to life and to those around us. We are not called to that. Jesus did not die to give us warm feelings. The work of the Holy Spirit—for this promise is ultimately about the Holy Spirit—is to make you precisely as Christ was in this world. And that means getting outside yourself, getting interested in others, and becoming useful. Have you entered into this promise? Are others experiencing abundance of blessing through you?

If not, you need to ask God to make you, not only a satisfied believer who has drunk of Christ for himself and has found his own needs met, but also a useful believer who overflows his family, neighborhood, and church with blessing. I assure you that you will never know the true extent of your own satisfaction until you become the channel for such a blessing for other people.

A Flood of Blessing

What would happen if we were each—each one who knows Jesus as his Savior—to become such a blessing? I suppose that, if each one were to become such a river, we should have a veritable flood of God's blessing.

I long for such a flood, don't you? What a wonderful thing it would be! Spurgeon spoke of it back in the nineteenth century, comparing it to the incoming tides on the Thames that lifted the great river barges. When the tide was out nothing could move those barges as they lay in the mud of the river's bottom. A team of men could not move them. Machinery could never get them moved out to the sea. But then the tide would come, and soon they would be floating. When the tide returned, even a child could move them by his hand.

Oh, for a floodtide of God's grace! I know of some boats that need floating. They do not work for God. They are not interested in the spiritual wellbeing of others. They do not come out to prayer meetings. They do not witness. I cannot move them. They need to be set afloat. Pray with me that there might be such a flood of God's grace through deeply satisfied hearts that we all might be borne up together and that

these along with many others might become active. God grant it, for their sake and for the world.

Chapter 97.
Christ, a Divider of Men

John 7:40-44

I am sure that I do not have all the answers to why the Lord Jesus Christ produces divisions among men, as he does. But this is the case, and I am not at all sure that it is to be regretted.

For one thing, Jesus himself prophesied that this was to be the case. He said, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household'" (Matt. 10:34-36). For another thing, divisions are natural where truth is concerned. They go with strong doctrine. The great Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon once wrote of the reality of this in his day, saying, "I have heard of a whole parish in which there were no religious bickerings because there was no religion; there were no religious strifes because nobody had anything worth striving for. And that," he added, "is not a state of things over which I can rejoice." Nor can anyone rejoice in such a situation. At the same time we must sorrow over the fact that any division between men and women over Jesus necessarily means that some will not believe in him or come to him for salvation. And we want many to come. This is the point of the verses to which we now come in our verse-by-verse study of John's Gospel, which tell us that at this point of Christ's ministry "the people were divided because of Jesus" (7:43).

A Division between Nonbelievers

In the first place, there was a division among nonbelievers because of him. Indeed, the verses talk primarily about this division.

There were those who thought him to be "the Prophet" (v. 40). This means that they were *willing to accept a portion of his claims* but not all of them. The prophet, of course, was the Messiah whose coming was foretold by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15. But in popular usage in the time of Christ this phrase had come to denote that prophet who was expected to come as a forerunner of the Messiah (Mal. 4:5-6). In other words, the prophet was thought to be the one who would point to the answer to man's need but who, nevertheless, was not himself the answer. In calling Jesus by this title, the people were acknowledging that he was a good man who spoke wisely. They were even recognizing a certain grandeur about him that might indicate that he was sent by God. But they were not admitting the full import of his claims—that he was God and that men and women could find spiritual satisfaction only by coming to him.

There are many today who act in this way. We speak of Jesus Christ and his teaching, and those who act this way merely sort out what is said so that all that might possibly exert a personal claim upon them is excluded. They will come to Jesus for inspiring thoughts. Perhaps they will even go to church on a Sunday morning for the "good" it will do them—or send their children. But they will not follow Jesus. They will not acknowledge him to be their Lord.

Second, there were people among the crowd who went further. These were *willing to acknowledge that he actually was all that he claimed to be*. They said, "He is the Christ" (v. 41). However, although they admitted Christ's claims, they did not do that one additional thing that is absolutely necessary. They did not follow out the proper consequence of their belief by coming to him.

Is it too much to suggest that there are people in any congregation and in any Christian group who can be described in this manner? It is probably most always the case. That may be the case for you. You have heard the Christian gospel over a long period of time, and you

understand what it is that we are talking about. You do not deny the truthfulness of the Scriptures. You affirm it. You do not doubt that Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God. You believe it. You do not question the factualness of the crucifixion nor the meaning of Christ's death for your life. You understand this. You know that he died for you. In fact, if you were to go elsewhere and hear a different gospel, you would know at once that it is different and would say, "But that is not what Dr. Boice has been teaching." All this is true, and yet you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. You have never determined to follow him. What a sad state! How tragic to have an orthodox head wedded to a rebellious heart! Why not make today the day in which you go the whole way and receive Jesus Christ as your Savior?

Third, there were people who *rejected Jesus entirely* and who did so apparently on a quibble.
Their friends had said, "He is the Christ." But they replied, "How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from the town of Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" (vv. 41-42). In other words, they thought that Jesus failed to satisfy one of the prophecies of the Old Testament about the Messiah. So they dismissed him. They had no further use for him or for his teaching.

How this reveals the true nature of their hearts! And with what irony John records their reaction! For instance, we cannot help noticing how this particular reaction revealed a great deal of pride in those who provided it. These people were largely from Jerusalem or from the outlying areas of
Judea. Galilee was to the far north, "in the sticks" to their way of thinking. So when they said, "How can the Christ come from Galilee?" they really were implying that Jesus was just not sophisticated enough to be their leader. We see this reaction today in those who consider Christians to be uneducated persons and who think of Christianity as being beneath their social level.

Moreover, the reaction of this part of the crowd also reveals a strange hypocrisy. For they were dismissing Jesus on a quibble while at the

same time refusing to investigate his claims, particularly whether or not he might actually have fulfilled this particular condition. The condition was twofold: that the Messiah be of David's line (he was to sit on the throne of David) and that he be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Jesus had fulfilled both parts. He had descended from David in a way that exhausted the Davidic line, combining in himself both the royal line through Joseph and the legal line through Mary. And he had been born in Bethlehem, though many did not know it due to the fact that he had grown up in Nazareth. Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament requirements. Yet the people who objected to him did not bother to investigate these requirements.

Are you one who has been rejecting Jesus Christ on a quibble? Do you refuse to come because you cannot understand where Cain got his wife? Or how God can punish sinners? Or why we are to believe in a virgin birth or a resurrection? There are answers to these questions; you will come to know them in time. But they must not be used as excuses for a failure to come to grips with Christ personally. Investigate him. Study his life and claims. But do so honestly. Honesty demands a determination to follow him if his claims are verified.

What a change there would be if men and women would really investigate Christ's claims! Years ago a friend of Harry Ironside was forced to leave his mission work in India because of ill health. Some time after his return from the field he received a letter from an elder in his church in India saying how much they missed him and assuring him that in his absence they were doing a great deal more praying and reading the Bible. In fact, the letter said, they were having a real "reBible." Well, the elders were right. For where the Bible is prayerfully studied spiritual insight and a genuine "revival" will follow.

Finally, some of those who heard Jesus at the feast *wanted to harm him.* John says "Some of them wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him" (v. 44). How are we to understand this group? There is no way to understand it. There is no way to understand men who would crucify the Lord of glory.

What shall we who know the Lord do? We must pray for those who cannot see the truth concerning him. God must open their eyes. We must help those who have seen in part but who have not yet made a commitment. We are to be witnesses, and we must love them. Indeed, we must love even those who are enemies. For by such love and through it God may call some.

Nonbelievers and Believers

There was clearly a division among nonbelievers then concerning Christ. But note: there is a far greater and categorical division between nonbelievers and believers.

It is impossible to overestimate this difference. On the one hand, we have the one who is not yet a Christian. He is described as "dead in ... transgressions and sins." He walks according to "the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air." He fulfills "the cravings of our sinful nature." He is a child "of wrath." On the other hand, we have the believer who through the grace of God is "alive" in Christ, seated "in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus," and "created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph. 2:1-10). The difference lies in the relation of each individual to the Savior.

We can see the differences in the practical outworking of their lives. The believer trusts Christ. Indeed, Christ is all in all to him, the only one who can be trusted totally. The nonbeliever trusts either in himself or in other people.

The believer loves Christ. Indeed, how could he help but love him! Jesus is the One who gave up the glory of heaven, laying it aside, in order to become man and die for him. Love sent the Savior to die in his place. Now he loves him. "We love because he first loved us." The nonbeliever does not love the Savior.

The believer also serves Christ. He is called to service. Recognizing his past, that before Christ's coming he was in bondage to sin, and knowing something of the deliverance that Jesus has bought for him through his

death, the Christian now recognizes himself to be no longer his own but the Lord's. He recognizes the truth of Paul's challenge: "You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Cor. 6:20). The unbeliever does not have this orientation to life's service.

Finally, the Christian is striving to be like Jesus. He may not be much like him. At times he may be much unlike him. Still this is his goal, and he can say with Paul, "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14). The goals of the unbeliever are a product of this world's culture or of his own desires.

Where do you find yourself in that contrast? Do you trust, love, serve, and strive to be like Jesus? Or are you living for yourself and serving yourself? If it is the second of those pictures, I trust that something of the power, love, and character of Jesus himself may reach you, so that you will come to him and do so without delay. The danger in delaying is that the end may come—you may die or Jesus may return—and the divisions of this life will be established for eternity.

Unity for Believers

Finally, although it is true that Jesus is the cause of these divisions, it is true also that he is the cause of the most profound and happy unity among believers. Jesus divides? Yes. But for those who know him he is also that which draws us together.

He is the only one who can draw us together. We who are Christians do not come from only one walk of life, as though we could be drawn together by a culture that we hold in common or by our backgrounds. We do not come from one race, as though we could be united ethnically. We are not even all of one nation or sex or intellectual attainment or status. All the causes for the divisions of the world at large exist within the Christian church. But there is this difference. Within the church and for Christians these divisions simply cease to matter. We are one. As

Paul says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

Let me share an early example of such unity with you. About the year a.d. 56, the apostle Paul was in Corinth where he had been dictating a letter to the Christians in Rome. While doing this he had been living in the home of a rich man named Gaius, who had presumably only recently been converted to Christ. He had been dictating through a slave who ranked number three among the slaves of that household. The slave's official name was Tertius, which means "three." Probably Paul had been composing this letter over a period of time, and as he had been dictating it various people had dropped by. Now, on this particular day, as he came to the end of the letter, some of these people came by again to hear him close it. They sensed its importance. Paul's fellow workers were there—Timothy, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater. Gaius was there, as well as his friend Erastus, an elected official in the city. Archeologists have since found Erastus's name, together with his office, inscribed in marble. And there are the slaves: Tertius (number three) and Quartus (number four).

Now observe what happens as Paul brings his letter to a close. Paul has already addressed the Romans, many of them by name. He has wished them well and added a benediction. Now he looks about him and begins to send greetings from those who are present in the room.

Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives....

Paul pauses, but as he does so Tertius, the scribe, keeps writing, as slaves sometimes did in antiquity.

I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord....

Then, as Paul picks up his dictation, Tertius continues on Paul's behalf.

Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director, sends... greetings....

Here, Quartus, the least important person in the room but one who feels his brotherhood with the

Christians in Rome, as do the others, and who is afraid of being left out, raises his hand to catch Paul's attention. Paul quickly adds, "And our brother Quartus." Now all have been included, from the most important elected official of Corinth to the least important slave in Gaius's household, and all have expressed their sense of belonging to the Roman Christians who live hundreds of miles away and whom most of them have never seen and would not see until they were united in heaven.

Here is a great example of the reality of unity in Christ and of Christian brotherhood. Christ is a divider of men. But he also is the source of a most blessed and transforming unity for Christians.

Chapter 98.
None like Jesus

John 7:45-52

Earlier in these sermons on the Gospel of John, verses were studied that spoke of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, of the fact that by any measurement there is no one quite like him. The verses were in John 1 (vv. 15-18), and we saw as we considered them that Jesus is unique in his origin, in being the sole source of blessing for men and women, as being full of grace and truth, and as the only one in whom you or I may see God. In this study we come to verses that speak of his uniqueness in yet another sense—the uniqueness of his words. These verses contain the reaction of the temple guards to his teaching. No doubt they had heard plenty of prisoners. But although they had been sent to take him, they returned empty-handed, saying, "No one ever spoke the way this man does" (v. 46).

These words, which obviously are of great importance, will be the jumping-off place for the present study.

The Story

We are helped a bit in our appreciation of these words by realizing that the guards had been some time in their unproductive attempt to seize Jesus. The attempt itself, mentioned for the first time in verse 32, had been initiated by the Pharisees and priests because they had found Jesus to be a threat to their teaching. They had observed him for some time, and they had realized (correctly) that he was opposed to any thoughts of salvation by legalism, the system of religion on which they prided themselves, and that he was therefore a threat to them. Besides, he was a blasphemer because, as they could see, he was making himself equal to God.

At the same time, it also was true that Jesus was relatively popular. And since they could not run the risk of looking like men who were opposed to a true man of God, a prophet, they did the only thing they could. They sent their own temple guards—not Roman soldiers—with orders to observe Jesus and then to arrest him whenever the occasion was suitable. "Arrest him," they said, "but do it quietly." Six months later, at the Passover, they were following the same course of action when they actually succeeded in having Jesus arrested by night in the Garden of Gethsemane. We do not know how long it was between the giving of the order on this earlier occasion and the report of the guards to their superiors recorded here. But we do know that it must have been some time. For at least a day had gone by, according to verse 37, and it may well have been longer. At all events, the picture we have is that of the guards lingering on the outskirts of the crowds for some time as Christ taught the people.

It is dangerous to linger around the Lord Jesus for whatever reason. It is dangerous to be exposed to his teaching. As time went by, these guards became impressed with what he was saying, and being impressed they found themselves unable to proceed with their mission.

Sent from God

What precisely had these men heard Jesus teaching? One thing they had heard Jesus saying was that He had been sent from God. We read, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my

own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me" (vv. 28-29).

There are times in our study of the Word of God when it is necessary for us to give particular attention to the smallest of words. We have such a case here. To do it helps us to see something very important about Jesus. Notice that Jesus said he was sent *from* God. He did not say that he was sent *by* God, though that would have been true and also important. He said that he was sent *from* God. This implies a previous existence with God; that is, a life with God before his incarnation. This in turn points to his full divinity. There are many men who have been sent by God. All the Old Testament prophets fall into this category. John the Baptist is an example. So, in another sense, are all of God's people today, for we all are sent by God as witnesses to this world. Many have been sent *by* God. Only one, the Lord Jesus Christ, has been sent *from* him.

Moreover, this and this alone meets our deepest need and longings. We hear much talk today about the "image" of God. The question involved in such talk is this—"How are we to picture God or visualize him?" We know, of course, that the Old Testament firmly forbids any attempt to make an image of God, for that tends to idolatry. Instead, the Old Testament suggests that we think of God in terms of his names—Jehovah, Adonai, El Shaddai, El Elyon—which reveal his nature. But at the same time when we recognize the value of this, we also recognize that names are not quite enough for those who wish to know God in a deeper and more personal way. "Can we never see God?" we ask. "Can we not know him?" It is just at this point that Christ's statements about himself and his origin come into the picture, for it is in Christ that we see the Father. "No one has ever seen God," as John says earlier. Nevertheless, "God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (1:18). The fact that Jesus is from God and is God dispels whatever previous mystery there may have been and meets our longing.

When we see this about Christ's teaching we see that Jesus was saying something so extraordinary that it should properly make an impression

upon us, just as it did upon the guards who had been sent to arrest him.

His Life Controlled by God

Second, having been sent from God, Jesus also knew and taught that the details of his life had been arranged and were controlled by God. That is, nothing ever entered into his life that was not sent into it by the Father, and he was doing nothing that deviated in any respect from the plan for his life that had been previously outlined in the Old Testament. In one sense, many of his words imply this. In this chapter, however, it is taught most explicitly in Christ's words to his brothers just before they went up to the feast. They wanted him to go up and try to recapture some of his declining popularity. He answered, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right" (v. 6).

What was the basis upon which Jesus could make such a statement? His brothers could go wherever they wished, and at any time, because their time was in their own hands. Their time had only the meaning they themselves were able to give it. Jesus, however, could not go to the feast at the time their question was asked, because his time was in the hands of the Father and received the significance that he alone gave it.

Words from God

Third, Jesus not only taught that he had been sent from God and that all the details of his life had been ordered from God. He also taught that his words were from God, so that anyone who heard him heard God. We read about it like this: "Jesus answered, 'My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching is from God or whether I speak on my own'" (vv. 16-17).

This gives us the true answer as to why his words made such an impact upon his hearers and why they continue to influence and motivate people today. If Jesus' words were merely human words, they might be of historical or even inspirational value. But they would have no ultimate influence or lasting authority. However, since Jesus' words are words from God, they are unlike other words and indeed possess full authority. They are true, for one thing. God is truth itself, and words that are from him will always be true. We can count upon them. Moreover, the words are powerful, for they convey something of that creative energy seen in the creation of the world by means of God speaking.

Once a leper came to Jesus with the claim of faith: "If you will, you can make me clean." Jesus replied, "I will; be you clean," and the foul disease left him. Once Jesus was in the house of a man named Jairus, whose daughter had just died. Jesus said, "My child, get up," and at once she returned to life. At the tomb of his friend Lazarus Jesus called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out," and Lazarus (who had been dead four days) came out from the tomb. What power! What love! It is a privilege to say that this power can be applied to you also as you respond to Christ's words, for he has promised forgiveness of sins and new life to all who ask him to be their Savior.

Hunger and Thirst

Fourth, Jesus declared that he was himself the answer to human need. He said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will

flow from within him" (vv. 37-38). The same idea is present in Christ's earlier claim to be the bread of life.

What hunger and thirst there are in the hearts of men. There are times, of course, when the hunger and thirst are not evident. In times of prosperity people seem to have everything, and we find ourselves asking, "What more could they want?" Sometimes we ask, "What more could I want?" Still, the thirst is there and it betrays its presence through a general uneasiness, anxiety, and depression, sometimes even through suicide or other irrational behavior. At other times in history—perhaps we are moving into such a period even now—the hunger is obvious, and we find people searching everywhere for something with which to satisfy themselves and not being able to find it.

Christ satisfies! If nothing but those two words could sink into those who follow this study, I would be satisfied. Christ satisfies! He does this by removing sin, which is always at the heart of man's problems, and then on that basis restoring the relationships between the individual and God and between the individual and others, which sin has broken.

A Blessing to Others

Finally, Jesus also claimed to be able to make all who come to him a blessing to other people. In fact, this claim is involved in the verses I have just quoted. For he said that the one who would drink from him would find within himself a river of water that would be overflowing (v. 38).

I know of no other way in which the great problems of our world will be affected. What is the source of our problems, whatever they may be —hunger, disease, exploitation, bigotry, war? Where do they come from? It is not the environment, though that is a factor in some cases. It is not the inherent evil of the authorities, for the authorities are merely people like ourselves in positions of power. The cause is mankind itself and, in particular, the sin of mankind. Until that is dealt with there will be no strong or lasting solutions. Therefore, we must begin with our sin, yours and mine, and then, having our own sin dealt with and being

filled with the joy that comes from knowing God, we will have something to offer others. When we are a blessing, then and only then will we be able to deal with those external problems that affect everybody.

The Words of Men

The words of Jesus *are* wonderful. They speak to us where we are. But how different they are from the words of men or from human teaching. This contrast is made for us in this story, for after we are told of the report of the temple guards—"No one ever spoke the way this man does"—we also are told some of the things the Pharisees and the chief priests said in responding to it. One of the responses to the guards was filled with pride. They said, "You mean he has deceived you also? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him?" (vv. 47-48). They obviously thought they were better than other people. Another of their replies was filled with contempt for the common people. They said, "But this mob that knows nothing of the law— there is a curse on them" (v. 49). Actually, the people knew the law pretty well, but the Pharisees despised them because they had not had opportunity to be educated in the rabbinic schools, as they were. Moreover, it was also true that their replies were filled with ignorance even of the true situation. For no sooner had they denied that any of the rulers had believed on Jesus than Nicodemus, one of their very number, spoke up for him. And no sooner had they expressed scorn for those who were ignorant of the law than they were chided by Nicodemus for their own disregard of it—"Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" (v. 51). Besides, in their answer to him, they showed ignorance even of the prophetic Scriptures, for they denied that any prophet could come from Galilee, when, in fact, Jonah—and perhaps others—had come from there.

There is pride, contempt, and ignorance in the best speeches of even the best of men. But many do not see this. In fact, no one does see it until he has first listened to and been enthralled by the Lord Jesus. Have you heard him? Have you recognized that there is indeed none like Jesus?

Hear him; he speaks to you. He says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." He says, "Come to me and drink." Let your heart respond with joy: "No one ever spoke the way this man does. I am coming, Lord Jesus!"

Chapter 99.
The Woman Taken in Adultery

John 7:53-8:11

When the rulers of the Jewish nation failed in their attempt to have Jesus arrested by the temple guards, they immediately devised a plot to trap him. This plot is the most despicable action by these men recorded in the Gospels. At the same time, it became an occasion by which Jesus not only revealed the depth of his justice, wisdom, and compassion but also provided a message of hope and great peace for those who come to him. The story is that of the woman taken in adultery. The problem of the story is how justice and mercy can be harmonized while, at the same time, neither encouraging sin nor condemning the sinner. In this respect it is a central, even a pivotal, point in John's Gospel.

Textual Problems

Before beginning our study of this story, I must be frank to admit that it involves us in a serious textual problem. The difficulty, simply put, is that the majority of the earliest manuscripts of John do not contain these verses and, moreover, that some of the best manuscripts are of this number. The best evidence for the story is its presence in Codex Bezae, of the fifth or sixth century, now in the University Library at Cambridge, England. But it is not in the older Codices Sinaiticus or Vaticanus, nor in the Washington or Koridethi manuscripts. In fact, of the older manuscripts, eight omit it entirely, though two manuscripts leave a blank space where it would have come. And not until the medieval manuscripts does it seem to have been included with any

regularity. Some early manuscripts attach it at other places, such as at the end of the Gospel or after Luke 21:38.

Does that mean that we should just throw out these verses? Should we place them in the same category as the apocryphal gospels? Interestingly enough, very few scholars (even many of the liberal ones) seem willing to do this, and the fact that a good case can be made out for the other side, should make one cautious in how he deals with it. I am willing to deal with the story as genuine—though perhaps not a part of the original Gospel as John wrote it—for the following reasons:

While it is true that most early manuscripts omit this story, it also is true that the story itself is old, regardless of who wrote it or whether or not it was originally in John's Gospel. We find it in *The Apostolic Constitutions* (third century A.D.). And Eusebius, the church historian, tells us that Papias (who died not long after A.D. 100) knew a story "of a woman who was accused of many sins before the Lord." Later, Jerome unquestioningly included it in the Latin Vulgate.

A good case can be made for its inclusion at this particular place in John's Gospel. For one thing, without it the change of thought between the fifty-second verse of chapter seven and the twelfth verse of chapter eight is abrupt and unnatural. We do not know where Jesus is in John 8:12, nor to whom he is speaking. For another thing, the introduction of a story at this point seems to fit the pattern that John has been using in these opening chapters. In each case, from chapter 5 onward, a story is used to set the theme of the teaching that follows. Thus, the miracle of healing the disabled man, which begins chapter 5, becomes the text of the sermon that follows. The feeding of the multitude in chapter 6 leads into the discourse on Christ as the bread of life. The discussion between Jesus and his brothers about going up to the feast in chapter 7 is an introduction to Christ's words at the feast. So, likewise, is the story of his dealing with the adulterous woman an introduction to that speech on the combination of righteousness and freedom in Christ that the rest of the chapter declares that Christ brings.

Third, there is an excellent reason why the story may have been omitted in the early manuscripts. In a contest with paganism, it is easy to see how the story might have been used by enemies of the gospel to suggest that Christ condoned fornication. Indeed, this is the reason for its omission given by both Augustine and Ambrose in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.

The fourth and last reason for dealing with the section is the feeling, which many have had, that this story is indeed true to Christ's nature, in accord at every point with his perfect holiness, wisdom, and deep compassion.

As we turn to the story we must see three things primarily: first, the horror of sin; second, the mastery by God of all circumstances; and third, the word of the Savior to the sinner.

Sin's Horror

First, the story reveals sin's horror. And, of course, I do not mean the sin of the woman. I mean the sin of the rulers. Adultery is sin, certainly. The woman was guilty of adultery. But compared to the sin of the men who were using her in an attempt to trap Jesus, her sin was minimal—a mote in her eye compared to the beams that were in their eyes (Matt. 7:1-5).

To understand precisely what these men were doing we must understand that not only was their approach to Jesus a trap; they actually had already been active in trapping the woman. In fact, it could hardly be otherwise, on the basis of their testimony and in light of the very exacting requirements of Jewish law in this and other capital cases. Under Jewish law, as it was practiced by the rabbis in the time of Christ and later, it was necessary to have multiple witnesses to the act of intercourse before the charge of adultery could be substantiated, and even this was to be under the most exacting of circumstances. Thus, as one scholar points out, "There is absolutely no question of [the witnesses] having seen the couple in a 'compromising situation,' for example, coming from a room in which they were alone, or even lying together on the same bed. The actual physical movements of the couple must have been capable of no other explanation, and the witnesses must

have seen exactly the same acts at exactly the same time, in the presence of each other, so that their dispositions would be identical in every respect."

Under these conditions the obtaining of evidence in adultery would be almost impossible were the situation itself not a setup. We are justified in supposing that the liaison had been arranged, perhaps by the very man who committed adultery with the woman. Was he a member of the Sanhedrin? Whatever the case, the arrangement must have involved the posting of witnesses in the room or at the keyhole.

We see the horror of the sin of these men in another way too. For the fact that only the woman was brought to Jesus reveals their dishonestly. If adultery could be proved only by the testimony of witnesses who had seen the couple in the very act of adultery and if this is what the rulers were claiming, as they were, where then was the man in the story? Why was he not brought with the woman? At the least, the rulers allowed the man to escape. At the worst, the man had been in on the plotting and had been granted immunity beforehand. How horrible! Yes, but it is only the old case of the double standard that exists still today. Men should take their stand with the women in such cases, confessing their share of the guilt, which is usually greater anyway. But they do not. The poor woman had to bear the shame alone.

God of Circumstances

The horror of sin is not the only subject these verses introduce, however. They also reveal the mastery by God of all circumstances.

We will appreciate this aspect of the story better if we realize that this was a serious problem with which the Lord was confronted. This was not like the problems with which he had been challenged before. On an earlier occasion the Sadducees, who did not believe in the afterlife, had come to him with a trick question about the resurrection. They imagined the case of a woman who had married seven brothers in turn, each one having died and having left her with no children. "In the resurrection, therefore, when they rise, whose wife will she be?" they asked. It was a

stupid, almost infantile question. So Jesus answered that they had erred, knowing neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. On another occasion some of the rulers tried to trap him with a question regarding taxes. But again this involved only the conflict between public sentiment and the law of Rome, and Jesus dealt with it easily.

It was not this way with this problem of the adulterous woman. In this case three important matters were at stake: (1) the life of the woman, (2) the teaching of Jesus about the compassionate nature of his kingdom, and (3) the divinely given law of Moses. The way the matter was posed —so it seemed to the rulers—there was little doubt that Jesus would have to relinquish one of these items.

Everyone knew that the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ had been marked by compassion. He had moved about among publicans and sinners. He had befriended the outcasts. He had said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened" (Matt. 11:28). But if he was consistent with this teaching and if, on the basis of his compassion for the woman, he actually waived the law of Moses, then the rulers could rightly denounce him as a dangerous and false prophet. What prophet could speak against the law? Jesus had already been suspected of this because of his attitude toward the sabbath regulations. If he rejected Moses' judgment, they had him. On the other hand, if Jesus upheld the law—if he said, "Kill the woman"—then they were also sure that they had him. For they reasoned, "If he says that, then we will ridicule him to the end of his days. We'll say, 'Sure, he says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened," but he neglects to tell you that when you do come he's going to stone you.'" With devilish insight these men had hit upon *the* problem of *all* problems in respect to the relationship of a sinner to God. How can God show love to the sinner without being unjust? Or, as Paul states the problem: How can God be both just and the justifier of the ungodly (Rom. 3:26)? From a human point of view the problem is unsolvable. In this the rulers were right. "Even if Jesus wants to show love, he cannot," they argued. But they were not aware that they were not dealing with a mere man when they dealt with Jesus. They were dealing with God, and with God all things are possible.

At first Jesus appeared to ignore them. Instead of replying he simply bent down and began to write on the ground.

I do not know why he wrote on the ground, and, what is more, I do not believe that anyone else does either. I have read numerous commentaries on these verses, and I have been surprised to find that nearly every one of them gives a different answer. Some have suggested that Jesus wrote on the ground to gain time. Others argue that he did so to force the accusers to repeat their charges, drinking that perhaps the shame of the situation might become evident even to them as they said it. Lawyers sometimes follow this procedure in courts of law. One person has suggested that Jesus was himself overcome with shame and horror in much the same way as he shuddered at the tomb of Lazarus or wept over the city of Jerusalem. Some suggest that this was a symbolic action, intended to remind the accusers of Jeremiah 17:13—"O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust." Perhaps, since Jesus knew their hearts, he was writing out their sins. Perhaps he wrote the words he later spoke. Whatever the case, the fact of Christ's writing had no effect on the rulers, who rudely continued to press for an answer. One of the sad effects of sin is that it hardens the sinner.

After a while Jesus stood up and replied, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (v. 7). How simple and, at the same time, how disarming! So we read that "those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there" (v. 9). Obviously, there was something in the gaze of the Lord Jesus Christ, or in the tone of his voice, or simply in the power of his presence that got through to these men, unrepentant as they were, and left them powerless. Think of the efforts they had gone through! Think of the plotting! Yet they were destroyed in a moment when they were confronted by the God who masters circumstances.

Words to the Sinner

At last, Jesus turned to the woman and for the first time addressed her directly. "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

She answered, "No one, sir."

"Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (vv. 10-11).

On what basis did Jesus make the statement, "Neither do I condemn you"? Some have suggested that at this point Jesus took advantage of the requirements of the law itself according to which it was necessary to have two or three witnesses in any judicial hearing. Jesus was one accuser perhaps, because he knew all things. But the others were gone, and so the requirements of the law could not be met. This may be right in part. Certainly it freed Jesus from having to condemn the woman. Yet to handle the matter like this is to miss the real meat of the story. For when we ask, "Why did the Lord Jesus Christ not pronounce judgment?" the only substantial and ultimately satisfying answer we get is that he did not pronounce judgment against the woman for precisely the same reason that he does not pronounce judgment against those who come to him in faith. It was because of the cross upon which he was about to bear the full penalty of God's wrath against every sin ever committed by those whom the Father had given to him. He did not give forgiveness easily. He did so only because he was about to make forgiveness possible by the act of suffering in place of the sinner. This is the gospel. This is the only solution to the problem of how God can remain just and also excuse the sinner. To us, salvation is free. But it is free only because the Son of God paid the price for us.

Finally, Jesus told the woman to stop sinning. This always follows upon divine forgiveness, for we cannot be saved by God and then continue to do as we please. We must stop sinning. At the same time, we can be glad that the order is as Jesus gave it. For if he had said, "Go, sin no more; and I will not condemn you," what hope would there be? We all sin, so there would be no forgiveness. Instead he says, "I forgive you on the basis of my death. Now, because you are forgiven, stop sinning."

I hope this has been your experience. I hope you have heard and understood these words of Jesus.

You must place yourself at some place in this story. Are you like the crowd, who stood watching? These witnessed forgiveness, but they did not enter into it. Are you like the rulers? These were sinners, like the woman, but they went away from Jesus without even hearing the words of forgiveness. Or, finally, are you like the woman, who not only heard but also received the gospel message? Of all who were there that day by far the best one to be is the woman. The crowd was indifferent, as crowds always are. The rulers went out from Christ into darkness and six months later were killing the sinless Son of God. But the woman—well, the woman was forgiven through Christ, who died for her sin and for yours, whoever you may be.

Chapter 100.
Never a "Thing"

John 7:53-8:11

There are two worlds, the impersonal world and the world of persons; not so much a world of things and a world of men, as a personal and an impersonal view of both men and things. Between these two worlds there is an invisible frontier which is within ourselves, and it is very difficult to cross."

These words by the noted Swiss physician and author, Paul Tournier, speak to a great problem of our time, the problem of treating persons as things and vice versa. And they suggest, quite rightly, that the source of the problem, as with nearly all problems confronting us, is in ourselves. People are not things, of course. They were not created as things by God. God himself does not regard them as things. Yet we often treat other people as things—whenever we try to use them for some end of our own, fail to listen to them, or refuse to see them as those for whom Christ died. Have you never heard said, "I'll be all right if I can just get

Mary to do so and so"? Or perhaps, "Why worry about Joe? He doesn't matter"? Or, "Let's just ignore him"?

If you have ever said these things or something like them, then you are guilty, as we all are, of that which Tournier is describing; and the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ toward people, which we find so brilliantly illuminated in the story of the woman taken in adultery, is for you and should prove helpful.

The Attitude of the Rulers

The first point we need to notice is the attitude of the religious leaders toward the woman, for it was the opposite of Jesus' attitude. In brief, the rulers tried to use the woman. We see this in the fact that the situation itself was a setup. Under rabbinic law it was next to impossible to secure a death penalty in a case of adultery. There had to be witnesses—two or three of them—and these had to observe, not merely a compromising situation but the very act of adultery. Moreover, in their testimony they had also to agree in every particular. An illustration of the failure to do this is found in the apocryphal story of Susanna in which the innocent Susanna is acquitted when the witnesses, who had conspired to perjure themselves against her, fail to agree in naming the tree of a garden under which the act supposedly was committed.

Under such circumstances it is almost self-evident that the rulers must have arranged the liaison, having stationed the witnesses in the room or at the keyhole. It was a situation quite similar to the use of private investigators and photographers in order to prove adultery today.

Moreover, the horror of this insensitive use of the woman is heightened by the probability that the woman was young. This is impossible to prove, of course, but it is suggested rather forcibly by the significance of the particular penalty called for by the woman's accusers. These men were calling for death by stoning, and the importance of this is that stoning was the penalty specified in the case of adultery by a betrothed bride, who usually would be young.

The general text prescribing death in the case of adultery is Leviticus 20:10, which says, "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife —with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death." Here the penalty is death, but the means of inflicting death are not specified. In Jewish practice at the time of Jesus the penalty was death by strangulation. On the other hand, in Deuteronomy 22:23-24 the penalty is death by stoning; but in this case the punishment applies only to a case involving an engaged girl who has proved unfaithful to the engagement by having relations with another man. Since engagements almost invariably involved young people, perhaps as young as thirteen or fourteen years old, we are justified in thinking that this was probably the case of the woman brought before Jesus. So we have a young girl, caught in what may have been her first offense, perhaps seduced and betrayed, if indeed this is what was required to secure her conviction. All this makes the situation more horrible.

Furthermore, we need to notice that, as the rulers used this woman, they were even found quoting Scripture, for they referred to the law and its punishments. It is sad and ironic, but so it was; and so it is for many who use the Word of God as they use people—for their own ends and apart from the grace and mercy of God that the Word communicates.

It is too bad that the rulers did not give even more attention to the Old Testament, rather than less. For if they had understood the full teaching of the Scriptures, they would have understood that in the sight of God each person is an individual, created by him for a specific purpose, and that the Word of God is not supposed to be used as merely one more tool to manipulate people.

In *A Doctor's Casebook in the Light of the Bible,* Paul Tournier, whom I quoted earlier, speaks of what he calls the extraordinary "personalism" of the Bible. "What distinguishes the God of the Bible from the divinities of every other religion is that He is a personal God, who speaks personally to man," he argues. God called Abraham by name, taking him out of his own country into a new land. "He makes a person of him through his personal obedience to a personal command. The

personal God makes man into a person." Tournier shows how God called to Moses, saying, "I know thee by name" (Exod. 33:17). He said to Cyrus, "I [am] the Lord, who call thee by thy name" (Isa. 45:3). "One is struck, on reading the Bible, by the importance in it of proper names," Tournier observes. "Whole chapters are devoted to long genealogies. When I was young I used to think that they could well have been dropped from the biblical canon. But I have since realized that these series of proper names bear witness to the fact that, in the biblical perspective, man is neither a thing nor an abstraction, neither a species nor an idea, that he is not a fraction of the mass, as the Marxists see him, but that he is a person."

Tournier is clearly right. And he is right when he calls upon Christians to share the biblical attitude. "If I forget my patients' names," he adds, "if I say to myself, Ah! There's that gallbladder type or that consumptive that I saw the other day,' I am interesting myself more in their gall-bladders or their lungs than in themselves as persons."

The religious rulers were obviously guilty of precisely this and worse. And we are also guilty, though on different levels. To them the woman was just a case. She had no feelings, no future, no need for saving. It was only in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ that she found mercy and regained her identity.

The Attitude of Jesus

This brings us to the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ toward the woman, and we find ourselves asking: What characterized his attitude? There are a number of answers.

First, the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ was characterized by *understanding.* This is the point at which everything else begins, for Jesus clearly knew what was going on both in the attitude and actions of the men and in the life of the woman. He was not fooled by circumstances nor by appearances. He was not deceived by the religious talk of the leaders, nor by the unrighteous actions of the victim. The

expectations of the crowd did not move him. In short, he saw both the good and the evil and moved accordingly.

We need to grow in such understanding if we are to become like Jesus. Apart from this understanding there are two errors into which we fall in dealing with men and women. The first is naivete. This is the error of believing that people are better than they are; it comes about by overlooking sin and evil. A person who is guilty of this error may be excessively optimistic. He may be loving and think well of all people and, as a result, be taken for a ride in many of his personal relationships. He will be used by the less scrupulous or more realistic. If such a person becomes disillusioned, however, he then runs the risk of falling into the other error, which is cynicism. This results in suspecting low motives in the best of actions and, in extreme cases, in refusing to enter into meaningful relationships with others at all.

In avoiding these errors—both naivete and cynicism—Jesus becomes our pattern. For he was able to look the worst of life in the face without being astonished or embittered and at the same time retain the purity out of which he was enabled to move in love toward the sinner. Earlier John tells us that Jesus "knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man" (2:24-25).

Naturally, we will never be able to understand other people completely, for our knowledge is limited by sin and by our human perspectives. Still, it is true that we can know people much better than we do and can be a help to them because of our understanding. Where does such understanding come from? It comes from the Word of God, for it is only in the Word that we can gain accurate insight into human nature and human problems. The Scriptures will show both the depravity of man, with all its complications in individual and corporate life, and the destiny of the redeemed as the result of God's perfect remedy for sin in Jesus Christ.

Second, the attitude of the Lord Jesus was characterized by *compassion.* This was linked to his understanding. Jesus knew the woman intuitively. He knew her sin and shame. He knew her potential. Because he knew

her, he loved her. It was always thus with Jesus. He saw people as sheep without a shepherd, as sinners without a Savior; from that understanding came compassion.

It is impossible to explain such compassion. We may point to its link with understanding, but that does not explain its real origins. It does not explain it in ideal situations, let alone in this one, or in any situation that involves the love of the righteous God for a sinner.

Imagine for a moment that you are a parent and that you have one of your children sitting upon your lap. The child says, "Daddy [or Mommy], do you love me?" You say, "Yes, I do," and you give the child a kiss.

Then the child says, "Why do you love me?" Well, what do you say to that question? There is just no answer. You cannot say, "I love you because you are good," for that is not true, and it may even be harmful. You would love the child even if he were bad, which he certainly will be sooner or later. And you would not want the child to think that your love depends upon his being good, for he would then doubt your love when he disappoints you. Then again, you cannot say, "I love you because you are beautiful." You would love the child even if he were not beautiful. You would love him even if he were retarded or deformed. Nor can you say, "I love you because you are mine," for you would love the child even if he were adopted. Why do you love him? Well, you love him in part because you understand him, but that does not explain your love. Love is unexplainable. The best you can say is that love is divine and that you love him because God himself has loved us.

Apply this to Christ's love for the woman. What can explain it? It is beyond reason, for every argument from reason would suggest that Christ should condemn her. She had broken the law. She had debased her own person. She even had violated that great illustration of Christ's love for the church and of the church's love for Christ: marriage. For marriage was given by God to illustrate that greatest of all relationships.

And yet, Christ loved her. He wanted to spare her, to save her. There was no love in the attitude of her accusers.

Third, the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ was characterized by *forgiveness.* This was his desire from the beginning—from the moment at which he stooped and wrote on the ground to the final moment in which he said to the woman, "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."

But it was not an easy forgiveness. It was not what Dietrich Bonhoeffer has aptly termed "cheap grace." It was costly, for it meant that Jesus would himself have to bear the justified wrath of God against the sinner. The Bible tells us that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), and it was precisely this that the Lord Jesus Christ bore for those whom he desired to forgive. Death means separation. In the physical sense death means the separation of the soul and the spirit from the body. In the spiritual sense it means the separation of the soul and the spirit from God. This, Jesus bore in our place. We probably will never understand in its fullness what this meant to the Savior, but we gain a sense of what it meant in that awful cry of dereliction wrung from his lips on the cross —"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In that moment God the Father turned his back on God the Son so that Jesus knew the reality of spiritual death and separation. At the time of his talking to the woman this was before him, but it was on the basis of what was coming that forgiveness was given. Today we look back on Christ's sacrifice, and the horror of what He bore for us compels us to come to him. Someone has said, "No other god has wounds." It is true. No other god ever was able to give himself in death for the sinner.

Fourth, the attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ was characterized by a *challenge.* He said, "Go now and leave your life of sin." This was not the same thing as merely allowing the woman to go her way, forgiven but free to do as she might choose. She was forgiven, but she was told to do better. It was, in short, the challenge of the sinless life. In the same way, Jesus confronts us. He understands us, loves us, forgives us; but he does this in order that we might not sin. Moreover, the element of

challenge is also to characterize the Christian's relationships with other people.

Persons or Things?

The conclusion of this is that our attitude toward others should be that of the Lord Jesus Christ toward us and not that of the rulers who had accused the woman. They had used the woman. Jesus had saved her. What made the difference? We can say that the men were only sinful human beings while Christ was divine, of course. That is correct. But it is not very helpful. What is helpful is to notice that before this incident Jesus had spent the night upon the Mount of Olives, where we know from other sources he was accustomed to spend the time praying, while the leaders for their part had spent the night scheming with one another and (some of them) in peeping through keyholes.

Where does this compassionate attitude toward other persons come from in practical experience? It comes only from communing with our heavenly Father. We are personal with others only when we know ourselves to be persons. We know ourselves to be persons only when we see ourselves as persons before God.

Chapter 101.
"I Am the Light of the World"

John 8:12

It is not an accident that the claim of the Lord Jesus Christ to be the light of the world occurs immediately after the story of the woman taken in adultery, the story that introduces the eighth chapter of John's Gospel.

The story of the woman taken in adultery may not have been in the original text of John's Gospel, that is, in the first copy of the book as John wrote it. But whether it was there initially or not, few can doubt

that the place where it finally was put was well chosen; for it follows well on the failure of an original plan by the rulers of Israel to arrest Jesus, and leads naturally into Christ's statement about being the light of the world. The story of the woman and her accusers is a greater revelation of the dark nature of sin than anything yet recorded in John's Gospel, and in it the purity and brightness of Jesus shine through abundantly.

It is appropriate to turn from the story itself to hear the Lord say, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (8:12).

Jesus already has been described as light in John's Gospel. In the opening chapter John wrote, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (v. 4). He spoke of the light six times in that context. In chapter 3 there is a similar reference. John said, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (v. 19). This verse and those immediately following refer to light five times in reference to Jesus. In each of these cases the image is in John's words only, however. So we read these verses and, if we have not read further, we find ourselves asking, "But why does John refer to Jesus in this way? Where did he get this image? How did he develop this idea?" It is only when we get to our present text that we discover the answer. John refers to Jesus as the light because Jesus referred to himself as the light. Indeed, John obviously remembered this and so developed the images even further in this Gospel and in 1 John.

Jesus' claim to be the world's light is the second of the seven great "I am" sayings that are a unique feature of this book. The others are: "I am the bread of life" (6:35), "I am the gate" (10:7,9), "I am the good shepherd" (10:11, 14), "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25), "I am the way and the truth and the life" (14:6), and "I am the true vine" (15:1, 5).

The Cloud in the Desert

If we are to understand the full import of what Jesus was claiming when he claimed to be the light of the world, we must understand this verse in terms of that to which Jesus was undoubtedly referring. This is particularly important because it is not what we would most naturally think. We read this verse—"I am the light of the world"—and we think of the sun. Indeed, we are encouraged to do that by uses of this image elsewhere, as in Malachi where the coming Messiah is spoken of as the "sun of righteousness... with healing in its wings." This is not a bad thing to do. There is even much to be learned from it. But it is not the image Jesus is using in John 8:12.

To understand what Jesus had in mind as he spoke to the people we must remember that these words were spoken shortly after the Feast of Tabernacles in the courtyard of the temple area (v. 20) where the ceremonies that were a part of that feast were conducted.

We already have noted one of these ceremonies. On each morning of the eight-day feast the priests of Israel joined in a procession to the pool of Siloam from which they drew water in golden pitchers. Then, returning to the temple area, they poured this water upon the altar of sacrifice. As they did this the people, many of whom accompanied the priests, sang and chanted. One verse used was Isaiah 12:3: "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." Another was Psalm 114:7-8: "Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turned the rock into a pool, the hard rock into springs of water." The use of Psalm 114 shows that the ceremony was conceived primarily as a remembrance of God's provision of water for the people of Israel during the years of their wilderness wandering, though it also pointed forward to the spiritual water that men would draw from God in the day of God's future visitation. It was probably at the high point of this ceremony that Jesus broke into the festivities by crying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (John 7:37-38).

The second ceremony was similar. On the first night of the feast, and probably on succeeding nights also, after the sun had set, two great

lamps were lighted in the courts of the temple. These were said to have cast their light over every quarter of the city. The lamps were meant to recall the pillar of cloud and fire that had accompanied the people in their wanderings in the desert. This was the cloud that had appeared on the day when the people left Egypt and had stood between the Israelites and the pursuing armies of the Egyptians the night before the crossing of the Red Sea. It kept the Jewish people from being attacked. Later it guided the people through the wilderness. It also spread out over them to give shade by day and light and warmth by night. I believe that it was in clear reference to the ceremony of lighting the lamps and naturally, therefore, also to the miraculous cloud itself that Jesus referred when he claimed to be this world's light.

This conclusion is supported by the fact that if it is so, then we have a striking succession of three great wilderness images in chapters 6, 7, and 8 of John's Gospel. In 6, Jesus is the new manna sent down from heaven. In 7, he is the water miraculously provided from the rock. In 8, he is the cloud. We therefore turn to the cloud itself and to its functions in order to determine the full meaning of this second of the "I am" sayings in John's Gospel.

God's Presence

Why was the cloud important? The most obvious way in which the cloud was important was that it symbolized God's presence with the people. This would be obvious from the fact that the cloud gave off light. For in an age that did not know an abundance of artificial light, light would always suggest God's presence. Besides, the cloud was so huge and so striking that this in itself would suggest a theophany.

We see this in the texts that refer to this unique phenomenon. For instance, the first reference to the cloud in the Old Testament clearly identifies the presence of the Lord with it. "By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night" (Exod. 13:21-22). Other passages tell us that God spoke from the cloud and that he sometimes broke forth from it in judgment

upon the sins of the people. In one striking passage the cloud is even addressed as God, for God is said to have raised himself up when the cloud rose and to have descended when the cloud descended. "Whenever the ark set out, Moses said, 'Rise up, O LORD! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you.' Whenever it came to rest, he said, 'Return, O LORD, to the countless thousands of Israel'" (Num. 10:35-36). At no time in their wandering were the people of Israel able to forget that the presence of God went with them and overshadowed them in all they did.

Apply this now to the claim of the Lord Jesus Christ. Long years before, the cloud of God's glory had departed from Israel. It once had filled the Holy of Holies of the temple before which Christ was standing. Now the innermost shrine was empty, and even the lamps that commemorated the departed cloud had gone out. In this context and against this background Jesus cried, "I am the light of the world. I am the cloud. I am God with you." Here was God once again with his people.

Have you found God in Jesus? Is Jesus, God with you? There is no other place in which you may find him. Come to him if you have never done so, and learn to say with John and the believers of all ages: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Protection

Second, the cloud was important in that it was the primary means by which God protected the people. Without it the people would have perished many years before they entered Canaan, either from their human enemies like Pharoah and his armies or from the natural dangers of the desert.

We must remember at this point that when the people of Israel left Egypt there were probably about two million of them. The Bible says that there were 600,000 men, but, of course, wives and children need to

be added to that number. This vast company of people was being led out into a desert region that, as anyone who has ever been there can tell you, is one of the most inhospitable regions on earth. In the daytime the temperature can easily reach 140 or 150 degrees, and at night it can fall below freezing. To survive in such a region the vast host of Israel needed water and a shelter from the sun. The rock, which Moses was instructed to smite with his rod, provided water. Shelter was provided by the cloud, which spread out over the camp of the people to give them protection. Without this special and miraculous provision the people would have died.

We sing about God's protection of the people in one of our hymns, a hymn that many who sing it probably do not understand.

> Round each habitation hov'ring,
> See the cloud and fire appear For a glory and a cov'ring,
> Showing that the Lord is near!
> Thus, deriving from their banner
> Light by night and shade by day, Safe they feed upon the manna
> Which he gives them when they pray.

In the same way the Lord Jesus Christ is a protector for all who come to him and follow him.

The Moving of the Cloud

Third, the cloud was important because it was the primary means by which God guided the people while they were in the desert. There were few, if any, landmarks in the desert, and the people would not have recognized landmarks even if they had seen them. Besides, the heat of the desert produces mirages, distorts distances, and makes most terrains indistinguishable. How were the people to find their way? How were

they to avoid wandering into hostile territory or around in circles? The answer God gave was the cloud. When the cloud moved they were to move; indeed, they had to move, for if they had remained where they were they would soon have died from the heat of the desert by day or from the cold at night. When the cloud remained in one place, they remained.

One long passage in Numbers makes this particularly clear. "Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. At the LORD'S command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. When the cloud remained over the tabernacle a long time, the Israelites obeyed the LORD'S order and did not set out. Sometimes the cloud was over the tabernacle only a few days; at the LORD'S command they would encamp, and then at his command they would set out. Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening till morning, and when it lifted in the morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out. Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. At the LORD'S command they encamped, and at the LORD'S command they set out. They obeyed the LORD'S order, in accordance with his command through Moses" (Num. 9:17-23).

We can easily see how this applies to Christ's statement. For when he claimed to be the light of the world in clear reference to the cloud of Israel's wandering, he was claiming not only that he was God with his people, or that he was the one who would protect them, but also that he is the one who gives guidance. Thus, when Jesus moves before us we are to move. When he abides in one place we, too, are to remain there.

Moreover, we are to avoid two errors. The first error is to be overly hasty in following him; that is, to follow so closely upon the moving of the cloud that we mistake its moving and find ourselves going in another direction. If we tend to make this mistake, we must remember that there was to be a clear space between the guiding ark over which

the cloud rose and the people— about "two thousand cubits" (three-fifths of a mile)—that there be no mistakes about the road. Alexander Maclaren, who writes on this theme, observes, "It is neither reverent nor wise to be treading on the heels of our Guide in our eager confidence that we know where He wants us to go."

On the other hand, we are not to be slow either. For, as Maclaren states, we are not to "let the warmth by the camp-fire, or the pleasantness of the shady place where [our] tent is pitched, keep [us] there when the cloud lifts." The only place of true blessing is under the shadow of God's presence.

Will You Follow?

To summarize: When the Lord Jesus Christ claimed to be the light of the world he was claiming to be these three things for his people—God with them, the source of protection, and the One who guides. These are great claims. But we must not overlook the fact that they are only for those who follow him. He said, "Whoever *follows* me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." To follow Christ is almost synonomous with believing in Christ; for in another, parallel passage Jesus uses the same image in declaring, "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness" (John 12:46). Faith in Christ is following Christ, or at least leads to following Christ. And following Christ is possible only for those who have faith in him.

Do you have faith in Christ? Are you following him? You should; for if you are, you have
Christ's promise that you will no longer be walking in darkness but will possess the light of life. The last phrase is another way of saying that you will possess Christ himself, who thereafter will become all things to you. The Bible says that he is made unto us "righteousness, holiness, and redemption," and that it is a joy to follow him (1 Cor. 1:30).

Chapter 102.
The Witnesses Agree

John 8:13-18

If you were an unscrupulous person and were about to be accused of a crime in court by a certain witness, what would you do to eliminate the impact of his testimony? Most of us would do nothing, of course, especially if we were innocent. But if you were guilty and were also unscrupulous, I suppose you would have three courses of action open to you. First, you could eliminate the witness; you could have him killed, perhaps, or else threaten him so that he would keep quiet. This has happened many times in actual criminal trials, as we know. Second, you could seek to discredit the witness. That is, if you could show that he does not possess good character, perhaps that he has lied in court before, you could get people to discount what he has to say on this occasion. Third, you could seek to have his testimonv thrown out of court on a technicality.

Here are three lines of attack for anyone who is unscrupulous, and I mention them now because they are precisely the lines of attack followed by those who tried to discredit Jesus Christ in that testimony he bore to men of God's nature and of man's need for salvation.

The first line of attack was to eliminate him. We saw an attempt at that in the closing verses of John 7, for these verses record an attempt by the leaders of Israel in Christ's time to have him arrested. They failed on that occasion, but they succeeded later, with the result that Jesus was brought to trial and executed. Second, they tried to discredit him by throwing such doubt upon his character that no one would listen to him regardless of what he had to say. This was the object of the abortive attempt to trap Jesus in the incident concerning the woman taken in adultery. The final attempt was to eliminate the force of his testimony as the result of a technicality. It is this to which we now come in our verse-by-verse study of John's Gospel.

Two or Three Witnesses

In the last verse we studied we found the Lord Jesus Christ making a stupendous claim. To be sure, he has made many stupendous claims thus far in the Gospel, but in this particular verse he states something that is very close to a claim to be God. He says, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (8:12). Since God was thought of in terms of light and life, and since this claim referred to the cloud of Israel's desert wandering that symbolized God's presence with the people, Christ's words must have seemed almost blasphemous to his listeners. By any standard it was at least a claim to his right to have men and women follow him. The leaders rejected both inferences.

But how were they to eliminate this testimony? They had already tried to have him arrested, and that had failed. He had proved too smart for them in the matter of the woman. Perhaps a technicality would do. At all events, they would try it.

In Jewish law there was a maxim to the effect that no one could ever be convicted on the testimony of a single witness. Always two or three witnesses were required. This principle was expressed in Numbers 35:30: "No one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness"; Deuteronomy 17:6: "On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness"; and Deuteronomy 19:15: "At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established." This had been interpreted in the broadest possible way by the rabbinical authorities so that it came to be applied eventually to all testimony. Nothing was to be believed unless more than one person could attest to it. And, of course, no one could testify concerning himself. The rulers now applied this to Jesus, their point being that whether or not his claim was true, at least insofar as evidence was concerned it was invalid. It was the testimony of just one man concerning himself and should be discounted. John tells us, "The

Pharisees challenged him, 'Here you are appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid'" (v. 13).

I must admit at this point that in some ways the subject we are covering is both technical and related to a past age. But in other ways it is simple and relevant to people today. There are many who would discount Christ's witness, not because it is untrue necessarily, but because according to their way of evaluating evidence, there is no way of telling whether it is true or not. They do not really disbelieve Christ, but so far as he is concerned they are agnostics. To such people particularly, and indeed to all of us, Christ's answer to the charge of the rulers is of great importance.

Superior Knowledge

In answering the charge that his testimony concerning himself was invalid on technical grounds, Jesus makes three points, the first being that in terms of the kind of matter to which he is testifying only a person with a superior source of knowledge can qualify and that he and only he possesses such knowledge. In his own words the reply was, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from and where I am going" (v. 14). In other words, if this were only a matter of something within the framework of human experience and apprehension, then the rabbinic maxim would hold true and would be useful. But in terms of knowing God, only God can testify. In this case, God the Son is bearing witness both to himself and to God the Father, and the testimony should be accepted because of these unique circumstances.

Perhaps there is even an indirect reference to another Jewish legal principle in this answer. For it was another principle that the character and status of the witness were involved in accepting or not accepting his testimony. This principle expresses itself largely in a listing of those who for their personalities, professions, or questionable activities were discounted as witnesses. Among such persons were thieves, shepherds (because they seem to have permitted their sheep to graze on another

person's property), violent persons, and all suspected of dishonesty in financial matters, among whom were tax collectors and customs officials.

Now, so goes Jesus' argument, if the rabbis reject the testimony of men whom they consider unreliable, and if they accept the testimony of an upright man when substantiated by that of another upright witness, why should they not then in Jesus' case accept the testimony of One who is more than a man? Jesus knows his origins and destiny, things that no other can know (v. 14). He judges according to truth and not, as do his opponents, according to the flesh (v. 15). He works in complete spiritual unity with God the Father (vv. 15-16).

This understanding of the passage is encouraged also by the fact that in the citation of the legal principle in John 8:17, Jesus is quoted as changing the original phrase "two witnesses" to "two men," thereby stressing the great gulf that exists between merely human and, therefore, limited testimony and his own.

Do you recognize this distinction? Have you seen that if Jesus is who he claims to be, then he is able also to bear testimony about God and to certain things about man that we could learn about in no other way? If he is not God, then we have no sure knowledge of God. If he is God, his statements and claims can be trusted.

Impartial Testimony

Second, Jesus defended his right to give testimony about God and man on the basis that his testimony is impartial. This is what he means in verses 15 and 16, where he says, "You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are right." The "human standards" in this verse stand for all that is human in man as opposed to that which is of God; it involves the limitations of being human, including limitations in knowledge and in objectivity. Here were men who were testifying about men. They were partial in their estimate of men. They excused themselves and others. In opposition to

this, Jesus declares that his judgment is not limited as theirs is, but rather is impartial.

Moreover, it also is sinless. For being of "human standards" in biblical language also implies being sinful; and this, too, Jesus is denying. He is the sinless One. So the distortions of sin do not enter to invalidate his testimony.

Sin always enters where human testimony and judgment are concerned. The story is told by lawyers of a not altogether honest judge from Virginia. He had been asked to decide a case concerning two railroads, and when the briefs came to him from the two lawyers representing the two railroads, they contained bribes. The first lawyer had sent a check for $10,000. The second lawyer had sent a check for $15,000. The judge looked at the two checks, thought a moment, then called his secretary. "Make out a check for five thousand dollars," he said, "and send it to the lawyer representing the second railroad. We're going to decide this case on its merits."

Men, even at the best, are sinful. So we should clearly accept the testimony of the sinless One over testimony rendered by any man or woman.

The Witness of the Father

Finally, the Lord Jesus Christ also pointed out, as he had done earlier in his ministry, that in the final analysis his testimony did not stand alone but actually was supported by the word of God the Father, thereby satisfying the rabbinical requirement that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word should be established. We find him saying, "In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father who sent me" (vv. 17-18). The witness of God the Father consists of a witness through John the Baptist (5:33-34), the witness of Christ's signs (5:36), and the witness of the Old Testament Scriptures (5:39-47).

What, then, can we say of Christ's testimony? When we put it all together we have the testimony of Jesus himself, characterized by

superior knowledge and impartiality, corroborated by the witness of the Father. Two great, two superior witnesses! And the witnesses agree!

Who can discredit such testimony? No one can discredit it; and no one has, though many have tried.

Three Applications

There are a few important applications to our own lives from these teachings. First, we must not trust our own judgment in spiritual matters. Our knowledge is limited. We are not impartial. We must not trust our own way of looking at things. This is the point of Proverbs 3:5-6, which says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

Second, we should trust the word of the Lord Jesus Christ implicitly. We should not trust our own understanding, but we should trust him because of who he is. There may be much in the Christian faith that we do not understand. There will be aspects of Christian truth that we will not like and wish could be eliminated. But that is not an option for us. Whatever Jesus says must be believed without question, and our own reasonings on spiritual matters must be subordinated. The Bible speaks of our duty along these lines by pointing to the proper goal of " [demolishing] every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and ... [taking] captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).

Third, if the word of Jesus Christ is true, then we should accept him as our Savior and follow him as our Lord. Have you done that? If not, let me challenge you to test his testimony and then to follow him if that testimony is valid.

The great Bible teacher and lecturer Reuben A. Torrey tells of a man who accepted this challenge. Torrey had been lecturing to a number of his students in Chicago and had been confronted at the end of the lecture by a man who claimed that his experience contradicted everything that Torrey had been saying. Torry had been telling how

doubt in spiritual matters could be overcome, and this man felt that he had done everything Torrey had suggested and yet was unconvinced.

"Let us be very definite about this," Torrey replied. So, calling his secretary, he dictated, "I believe that there is an absolute difference between right and wrong, and I hereby take my stand upon the right to follow it wherever it carries me. I promise to make an honest search to find if Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and if I find that He is, I promise to accept him as my Savior and confess him publicly before the world." The secretary brought two copies. "Will you sign this?" Torrey asked.

"Certainly," said the visitor, as he signed one copy and returned the other to Torrey. "But there is nothing to it," he added. "My case is very peculiar."

"Now, another thing," said Torrey. "Do you know that there is not a God?"

"No, I do not know that there is not a God," was the answer. "I am an agnostic in the matter. I neither affirm nor deny."

"And in that case, you also do not know that God does not answer prayer," Torrey continued.

"That is correct."

"Well, then," said Torrey, "here is a clue for you in your search to discover if Jesus Christ is the
Son of God. You must pray. Pray something like this, 'God, if there is a God, show me if Jesus
Christ is Your Son or not; if You show me that He is Your Son, I promise to accept him as my Savior and confess him to be such before the world.' Will you do that?"

"Yes, I'll do that, too," the man answered. "But there is nothing to it. My case is very peculiar,"

"There is also one final thing. In John 20:31, John says, 'These [things] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,

and that by believing you may have life in his name.' Here John tells us that his Gospel was written to show men the proof that Jesus is the Christ and God's Son. Will you read the proof? And will you pray the prayer I have suggested each time before you begin to read it?" The man replied again that he would. But he added once more that there was nothing to it.

The two men parted, and each went about his own affairs. Two weeks later the two met again in Torrey's lecture hall. But this time the skeptic said, "You know, there was something to that. Ever since I have done what you suggested I feel as if I have been caught up and am being carried along by the Niagara River. The first thing you know I shall become a shouting
Methodist."

Torrey became one for the occasion and cried, "Praise the Lord!"

Again several weeks went by, in which Torrey lectured in the East, but when he returned, the man was waiting for him. He had become a Christian. His testimony was, "I can't understand now how I ever listened to anything else."

If you are not yet a Christian, this can become your story if you will face the evidence. Will you face it? God does not want you to be in confusion but to be certain in your knowledge of Christian truth.

Chapter 103.
Three Questions

John 8:19-27

Once, when a member of Tenth Presbyterian Church and I were joking about the course of much theological discussion, we pointed out how such discussion often goes downhill in quality and ends up in personal invective. We were imagining how it might be between the pulpit of this

church and an opponent, whom we shall call John Smith. Smith disagrees with the doctrines of the Reformed faith that he hears me teaching; so he writes a book questioning them. It is called *Calvinism Surveyed.* The second step in the debate is my reply; it bears the title *Arminianism Refuted.* Now John Smith gets lengthy. He compiles a three-volume work entitled *The Teachings of James Montgomery Boice Exposed.* I reply with *The Heresy of John Smith.* The final work in the debate is by the man who started this controversy; it is a pamphlet called "Come out from among Them and Be Ye Separate."

We were only being humorous, of course. I don't even know a John Smith. But what we were saying unfortunately does illustrate the course of much theological discussion. What is more, it illustrates a point that I would like to make in connection with the eighth chapter of John's Gospel.

Scorn of the Pharisees

We need to understand, if we are to enter fully into the spirit of this chapter, that the relationship between Jesus Christ and the rulers of the people was deteriorating. At least that is the way we would describe it from a human point of view. These chapters (chapters 5 through 8) record the rejection of Jesus by the leaders, beginning with their opposition to him on the sabbath question in chapter 5 and ending with a complete break in chapter 8. In fact, the next chapters will begin a new theme: the relationship of Jesus to those whom the Father has given him and his provision for them. At this point, however, John is still tracing the deteriorating relationship between Jesus and the leaders and is showing us that it reached a new low.

It had sunk quite low already, of course. First, there was the attempt to arrest Jesus (7:32). This failed. Next there was the attempt to trap him in the matter of the woman taken in adultery (8:311). Jesus showed himself to be too smart for the rulers in this situation. Third, there was the attempt to have his testimony discounted on the basis of a legal technicality (8:13). He had an answer even for this. So, after Jesus had escaped arrest, overcome them in the test, and answered their objection

to his testimony, the Pharisees and other leaders sank to the lowest level of all and began to make fun of him personally. They did this by asking insulting questions.

There were three questions. The first was, "Where is your father?" (v. 19). At the least this was a scornful rejection of Jesus' statement that there was a second witness to his claims. But it may also have been a reference to the peculiar nature of the facts surrounding his birth and to their belief—with insulting and demeaning overtones—that Joseph was not Christ's father. This slur may also be evident in the saying recorded later: "We are not illegitimate children" (v. 41).

The second question was, "Will he kill himself?" (v. 22). The force of this query is seen in the Jewish belief that those who killed themselves went to the lowest part of Hades. Jesus had just said, "Where I go, you cannot come." They had correctly understood that he was speaking of his death, but they reasoned that since they would surely be going to heaven he must be going to hell, and the lowest part at that.

The final question, "Who are you?" (v. 25), had the effect of calling him a nobody. It implied a rejection of all the things he had said about himself previously.

What was Jesus' response to such questions? What was his reaction to the scorn they expressed? It is interesting that Christ answered by the strongest series of statements about the fate of the unregenerate person that we have thus far in John's Gospel.

God Gave Them Up

The first thing the Lord Jesus Christ said when faced by the scornful questions of these men is that *such questions are not asked by those who know him* and that, therefore, those who ask them do not know either him or God the Father. This point was so important that Jesus repeated it in different terms after having said it the first time. He first said, "You do not know me or my Father... if you knew me, you would know my Father also" (v. 19). Then he added, "You are from below; I

am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world" (v. 23). In other words, these men (despite their position and learning) did not know God, and it was because of this that they asked such scornful questions.

This is quite interesting for us, because it runs counter to our natural way of looking at things. To our way of thinking, asking questions is good. We say, "How are we going to learn if we don't ask questions?" That is right, to a degree. Even in Bible study it is right, for we need to ask, "To whom is this written? Who is speaking? What does it say? How does it apply to me?" and so on, if our Bible study is to be helpful. At the same time, we need to recognize that in spiritual matters there is a type of question that is not at all helpful. This type of question is aimed not so much at finding out the truth but at resisting the truth. It really is an attempt to justify a refusal to believe what God has already made known to us.

This is what God is speaking about in the first chapter of Romans where we are told that God gave certain men over to a reprobate mind because "they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God" (1:28). Certain things about God are known to all men. Romans 1:20 speaks of them. But because men and women do not like what they know and do not want to recognize the conclusions that flow from it, they refuse to retain this knowledge of God and therefore willfully reject him.

David tells us why in slightly different language. He writes in Psalm 77:3: "I remembered you, O God, and I groaned." God will always trouble those whose hearts and minds are not at peace with him through the death of Jesus Christ. Therefore, since men do not like to be troubled in their minds and pricked in their consciences, they do everything they can think of to banish God from their knowledge. One way is to ask questions, even the kind that are asked by many theologians and ministers: Who is God? What was Jesus really like? What is the meaning of the cross to men today? The sad thing is that this is unnecessary, for the knowledge of God exists to be seized by

those who will have it since God is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and in the Scriptures.

The first chapter of Romans reminds us of one more truth. The truth is in the form of a warning of what God does to those who will not retain the knowledge of him. We are told that God "gave them over." The Greek suggests the thought that since men have abandoned God, God has abandoned them. They gave God up, so God gave them up.

This is a terrible phrase: "God gave them over." It occurs three times in Romans 1. In the first instance we are told that because men refused to glorify God as God and were not thankful, God gave them over to uncleanness (v. 24). The reference is to sexual sins. Second, we are told that because men exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, God gave them over to vile affections (v. 26). This refers to sexual perversions—homosexuality, lesbianism, and so on. Finally, after it is said that they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, we are told that God gave them over to something that is far worse than these sexual sins. God gave them over to a reprobate mind (v. 28). That is, he abandoned them to their own corrupt judgment. This is a terrible fate, as is proved by the horrible list of sins that follows this verse, which sins, God says, flow from man's reprobate judgment.

The Day of God's Grace

Second, Jesus taught that *the day of God's grace would not last forever.* He taught this in two ways: first, by reference to his own death and departure, after which they would seek for him and would not be able to find him and, second, by reference to the fact that they would die also (8:21). The day of God's grace either in historical or personal terms is not endless. Hence, the personal act of entering into a right relationship with God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ should not be delayed. To delay is folly.

Why is it that people will exercise common sense in a thousand matters of daily need in this life but will not exercise common sense in the

matter of eternity? People will provide for themselves financially, saving up for the day of retirement when they no longer will be able to continue working as before. They will provide for their health. Not only will they go to the doctor when ill; they will exercise preventive medicine by following a series of regular checkups, tests, and inoculations. They eat well. They take vacations and provide for periods of exercise. In all these matters, men and women will exercise the most commendable common sense. But they will not prepare to meet God in this, the day of his grace.

Years ago an evangelist preached a sermon on the text, "Prepare to Meet Thy God," and his first point was this: "The greatest reason why you should prepare to meet your God is that you must meet your God." That is true. Unless your case is settled out of court through your personal response to Jesus Christ, you must appear before the judgment bar of God the Father and answer for your rejection of Christ. Will you respond to him? The Bible declares, "Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

No Excuse

Third, Jesus replied to the scorn of the Pharisees by the truth that if they would not believe on him as their Messiah and Savior, *they would die in their sins* (vv. 21, 24). There are two ways to die, according to the Bible. You may die "in the Lord"—Revelation 14:13 says, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on"—or you may die "in your sins." To die in sin means to die with the burden of one's sin upon oneself and, as a result, to be forced to bear the penalty of sin, which is spiritual death. God says that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Physical death is the separation of the soul and the spirit from the body. Spiritual death is the separation of the soul and the spirit from God. To die in sin is to die separated from God and to remain so forever.

Moreover, it does not at all matter whether or not you are aware of this. It is true nonetheless. You may try to forget about this, but the day of

God's judgment will reveal the sin that many have tried to cover over with the world's values and activities.

What people have tried to do may be illustrated by a particular type of manuscript called a palimpsest. A palimpsest is a manuscript with two entirely different writings on it, one over the other. When the manuscript was first written it was written as any other manuscript is written, with line upon line of characters reproducing some ancient text. Later, however, when the earlier writing had faded somewhat and paper was scarce, someone took the old parchment or papyrus, turned it sideways, and wrote a new text over it. These palimpsests vary in quality. In some, both writings can be clearly seen. In others, the newer writing has almost entirely replaced the old. Scholars often recover this older and more valuable writing by using acids, ultraviolet light, and X-rays. So it is with the heart of man. In the early ages of the human race God wrote his standards of conduct upon the heart of man. But when man violated God's standards and when his conscience was troubled by that fact, man allowed the original writing to fade and eventually, turning the page sideways, wrote over God's writing with the darker ink of his own dark deeds. Some day, however, the acid of God's judgment will eat away the newer writing, and men will be exposed as sinners to be judged by that standard that God originally placed within the life and conscience of all.

Separation from God

Finally, Jesus said the most sobering thing of all. He said that if the men who refused to believe in him continued to refuse him and therefore died in their sins, *they would go to hell and not to heaven.* It is true, of course, that Jesus does not mention hell by name in these verses, though he does elsewhere. But the existence of hell and the fact that hell is the destiny of those who refuse him is still stated. Jesus said, "You will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come." Where was he going? He was going to heaven. So if they could not come where he was going, they could not come to heaven and would remain without God and apart from God forever.

The frightening thing about this statement is that there is no escape from it. If it were only a matter of human judgment, then there would be a possibility of escape at least. For instance, a criminal might escape prosecution if his crime should go undiscovered or if no one should discover that he is the criminal. Apparently this happens often, for in many cases police are unable even to find a suspect though a crime has been committed. Or again, a criminal may escape from the sphere of the law's jurisdiction, as the financier who fled to South America in order to escape prosecution on charges of tax evasion. Finally, a criminal may escape on a technicality.

Here are three ways in which a criminal by human law may escape the law's judgment. But there is no escape from God's judgment. Do you think that a crime and the one who has committed it are unknown to God? Do you think that you can escape God's jurisdiction? Do you think that a technicality can get you off? These abuses of the law may pass on earth, for human judgment is imperfect. But they will not pass in heaven. There is no escape. No escape! You must meet God and answer for your sins.

Someone will say, "But that is frightening. Are you saying those things just to frighten me?" In a sense I am, for I would like you to be so frightened by the warning the Lord Jesus Christ gives that you will turn from your sin and cleave to him. The gospel tells us that Jesus died for your sin. He died both physically and spiritually—he was separated from God—so that you and everyone else might not have to die spiritually. He removed our sin, so that all who believe on him might have eternal life and be able to follow him to heaven.

You can assess your relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ by the way in which you would answer the questions that were posed by the Pharisees and with which we began. "Where is your father?" Can you say, "Your Father is God Almighty, and you are his Son"?

Will he kill himself? Can you say, "In one sense, yes, for he gave himself for us"?

Who are you? Can you say, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God; you are my Savior"?

Chapter 104.
The Uplifted Christ

John 8:28-29

Our text tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ was to be "lifted up" and that, when he was lifted up, certain consequences would flow from it. These two words—"lifted up"—introduce us to some wonderful truths from John's Gospel.

We should notice from the beginning that John in three different places speaks of Jesus being lifted up and that these should rightly be taken together in order to gain the full force of his teaching. The first text is John 3:14-15: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." The verses stress the necessity of Christ's crucifixion. The second text is the one to which we have now come in our study, John 8:28-29. Jesus says, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be, and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me, he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." The last passage is the well-known cry of Jesus in John 12:32: "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."

These three passages, all of which stress the truth that Jesus was to be lifted up, carry us to the heart of the gospel and stress its consequences. We should therefore explore this theme by a careful study of each passage.

Jesus Must Die

The first text, then, is John 3:14-15. It is a good one with which to begin, for it makes clear precisely what is meant by this unusual phrase. Sometimes preachers have used the last of these three verses—"But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself"—as though the phrase referred to our need to lift Christ up in our preaching. We do need to lift Christ up in our preaching, of course. But while it is true that if we lift Christ up in preaching he will indeed draw men and women to himself, this is nevertheless not the primary sense of the metaphor. To be lifted up means to be lifted up on the cross in death. It is a reference to Christ crucified. Consequently, John 3:14 compares Christ's being lifted up to the lifting up of the serpent upon a pole in the wilderness when the wandering Israelites were afflicted by the poison of deadly serpents and were dying. John 12:33 says simply, "He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die."

Moreover, the first of these verses also stresses the divine necessity in Christ's death, for it says, "So the Son of Man *must* be lifted up." Why is this so? Why was it necessary for Christ to die?

One answer to that question is that it was necessary because Christ's death was part of God's eternal plan to save sinners. But that is too general to be of much help. A far better answer is that it was necessary because nothing else could accomplish God's purpose. In the first place, no other person existed who could pay the price of our sin so that we might be forgiven for our sin and go free. No man could do it. Men are sinners, and each one (except those who are Christ's) must pay the price of his or her own transgressions. Only Jesus, who is more than a man and without sin, could pay the price of sin and so save us. This he did, as we correctly sing:

There was no other
  good enough To
  pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
  Of heaven, and let us in.

It was necessary for Christ to die, for no one else was able to die that death that would save sinners. Moreover, it was necessary for Christ to die also because nothing but a crucified Christ will draw men to God. Nothing but this will even draw men to hear preaching. Liberalism does not draw men. The cults do not draw men in great quantities. Men and women will not long attend a mancentered religion. But preach Christ crucified—preach him in the power of the Holy Spirit—and men and women will begin to come to him. They begin to leave their comfortable homes in the suburbs and come to city churches, where they would have come for no other reason. They begin to take weeks of their vacation time and attend seminars or attend Bible conferences. At times they will even mass in the millions as they did in Korea for the Billy Graham crusades in that country.

Preach any Christ but a crucified Christ, and you will not draw men for long. But preach the gospel of a Savior who atones for the sins of men and women by dying for them, and you will have hearers. Moreover, as Christ is lifted up, many of those who hear will believe.

Source of Knowledge

The second text is John 8:28. Here the emphasis is upon the fact that the leaders of the people would come to know certain things about Christ, the truth about Christ, only after they had killed him. Consequently, the verse points to the cross as the only basis for true knowledge in spiritual things. Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own, but speak just what the Father has taught me."

There are two senses in which this is true. First, it is true because it is only at the cross of Christ that the stubborn and rebellious will of man is conquered. Since a rebellious will is the major barrier to a reception of God's truth and since it is only at the cross that the barrier is removed, it is therefore only at the cross that the light of God's revelation is enabled to illuminate the soul. Jesus said, "If anyone chooses to do God's will,

he will find out whether my teaching is from God or whether I speak on my own." It is at the cross that we are enabled to will it.

But then, too, it is in the glory of the cross and in those manifestations of God's power that surround it (particularly in the resurrection) that we have the fullest proof of Christ's divinity and teaching. So the evidence leads people to knowledge. This is indicated in the word that John uses when he says that Jesus was "lifted up." There are different words in Greek that are translated as "lifted up" in English. Most common are *airo* and various compounds based upon it—*egeiro*, *espairo*, and so on. John does not use these words in the verses we are studying. Instead, he uses the verb *hupsoo*, which means "to exalt" or "to elevate." The overtones of this word show that John is thinking of Christ's glorification even as he writes of his crucifixion, thereby indicating that the cross, as the first step in that glorification, becomes a proof of Christ's teachings.

Jesus said that after he had been lifted up—by the crucifixion and eventually to the Father by means of the resurrection and the ascension—the rulers of the people would no longer be in ignorance of who he is but would know that he is indeed Jehovah. These are sobering words. If they are true—and they must be true if Jesus said them—they mean that the rulers were later found to be rejecting Christianity in large measure not for a lack of knowledge about him but because of sin. They knew who he was, many of them at least, and yet they would not have him as their Savior.

Perhaps the situation is repeating itself today, for there has never been a period in history when there was more knowledge about Jesus Christ and yet in which so few seem willing to follow him. Lack of knowledge can hardly be pleaded as an excuse by those of our well-educated and informed generation.

The Great Attraction

The final verse of the three we are considering is most important, for it speaks of the drawing power of the uplifted Christ. It tells us that he is

the great attraction. "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." Why is it that Jesus as the crucified Son of God draws men and women to him? There are two reasons. Let me share them with you from a great message on "The Uplifted Christ" by Reuben A. Torrey.

"First of all," Torrey writes, "Christ crucified draws all men unto Himself because Christ crucified meets the first, the deepest, the greatest and most fundamental need of man. What is man's first, greatest, deepest, most fundamental need? A Savior? A Savior from what?
Underlying all else, a Savior from the guilt of sin. Every man of every race has sinned. As Paul in Romans 3:22-23 says, 'There is no difference: For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' There is no difference between Jew and Gentile at this point, nor is there a difference between English and German at this point. There is no difference between American and Japanese at this point, no difference between European and Asiatic, no difference between the American and the African. 'There is no difference: For *all* have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' Every man of every race is a sinner; 'there is no difference' at this point. Every man shall have to answer for his sin to the infinitely holy God who rules this universe. Therefore, all men need an atoning Savior, who can by His atoning death make propitiation for, and so cover up our sins....

"In all the universe there is no other religion but Christianity that even offers an atoning Savior. Mohammedanism offers Mohammed, 'The Prophet,' a teacher, but not a savior; Buddhism offers Buddha, supposedly at least a wonderful teacher, 'The Light of Asia,' but not an atoning savior; Confucianism offers Confucius, a marvelous teacher far ahead of his time, but not an atoning savior. No religion but Christianity offers an atoning Savior, offers an atonement of any real character. This is the radical point of difference between Christianity and every other religion in the world; yet some foolish preachers are trying to eliminate from Christianity this, its very point of radical difference from all other religions.

"But such an emasculated Christianity will not reach the needs of men and will not draw men. It never has and it never will. The Bible and history are one at this point. Jesus Christ offers Himself lifted up on the cross to redeem us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse in our behalf, 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree' (Gal. 3:13). People know their need; they may try to forget it, they may try to deny it, they may try to drown their sense of it by drink and dissipation or by wild pleasure-seeking or wild money-getting, or by listening to fake preachers in supposedly orthodox pulpits.... But in spite of all our attempts to drown or stupefy or silence our sense of sin, our consciousness of guilt before a holy God, we all have it, and like Banquo's Ghost it will not quiet down. Nothing gives the guilty conscience abiding peace but the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. So, Christ *lifted up* draws all men unto Him, and even wicked ministers of Satan ...sometimes come to their senses and flee to the real Christ, *Christ crucified,* as I hope they all may.... Happy the man or woman who yields to that drawing. Woe be to the man or woman who resists that drawing; final gloom, despondency and despair are their lot."

Drawn by Love

"In the second place," continues Torrey, "Christ lifted up on the cross, Christ crucified, draws all men unto Him, because lifted up there to die for us He reveals his wonderful love, and the wondrous love of the Father for us. '*Hereby* perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us' (1 John 3:16), and 'God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8). There is nothing that draws men like love. Love draws all men in every clime, but no other love draws like the love of God. John 3:16, 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,' has broken thousands of hard hearts."

Torrey then tells this story. "Many years ago in Chicago at a Christian workers' Convention, I preached in the First Methodist Church on

Sunday night. When I gave out the invitation, among many who stood up was a beautifully dressed young woman, but she did not come to the altar with the others. The next night I saw her at the regular session of the conference, and calling to someone else to take the chair I went down to the back of the church so that I could speak to her when the meeting was dismissed. As soon as the benediction was pronounced, I hurried to the seat where she was standing before she had time to leave, and asked her to sit down while I spoke to her. I asked why she had not taken a decided stand when rising the night before. She gave a light, frivolous laugh and said, 'Oh, you don't know my life.' Then with apparently utter shamelessness, before I could speak, she began to pour out a story of awful sin. She told me how she had spent the past Easter, and then said with a laugh, 'Funny way to spend Easter, wasn't it?' I was appalled at the disgusting shamelessness of it all," said Torrey, "for she was a woman in good position. I simply took a little Bible that I had, and opening it at John 3:16, asked her to read it. The print was fine and she had to hold it close to her eyes to read. She began to read flippantly, 'For God so loved the world,' then she became suddenly still. She read on, 'that he gave his only begotten Son,' but now the tears welled up in her eyes, and dropped down on the beautiful gown she wore. The love of God was conquering, the love of God was drawing. The picture of Christ lifted up has won millions."

Christ lifted up is not something that may easily be dismissed as irrelevant. It is of great importance, and that for three reasons. First, it is important because it was absolutely necessary, because it was within the eternal plan of God to save sinners. Second, it is important because it is the sure basis for all true knowledge in spiritual things. You must come to the cross if you would know God or know him more completely. Finally, it is important also because of the fact that the uplifted Christ draws sinful, ignorant, and rebellious men and women to him, conquering them by the unimaginable, unfathomable love that is so clearly displayed there.

May that love conquer your heart. If it has not yet done so, look now to Jesus. See him lifted up on the cross for you, dying in your place,

wounded for your transgressions that by his stripes you might be healed. And come to him. The world has never before seen nor ever again will see such a Savior.

Chapter 105.
Believing on Jesus

John 8:30-32

Across America on any given Sunday thousands of sermons will be preached to those who are Christians to urge them to live like Christians, and many thousands more will be preached to those who are not Christians to urge them to believe in Jesus. I doubt if many are preached to those who already believe the doctrines of Christianity and who think they are Christians but who, nevertheless, have never come to the point of accepting the Lord Jesus Christ personally as their Savior. This study is for such people.

The interesting thing about the situation that I have just described is that most people who listen to Christian preaching are, I am convinced, in the last of these categories. That is, they are not genuinely born-again Christians, but neither are they hostile to Christianity. They believe the doctrines. It is just that they have never committed themselves to Jesus Christ and are not really his. They believe, but they are not disciples. They do not deny Christ, but neither do they follow him. A sense of the magnitude of this problem can be seen from the fact that in both Britain and the United States, well over 90 percent of the people surveyed in opinion polls claim that they believe in a personal God. But very few, obviously, do anything about him. In many cases they do not even expose themselves to Christianity.

What should be said about this situation? Or, more particularly, what should be our attitude to such people? The correct answer comes from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ when he said to those who in his day believed what he had to say but, nevertheless, had not committed

themselves to him, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (8:31-32).

Two Kinds of Belief

To understand what the Lord Jesus Christ is saying in these verses and to apply them properly, we need first to understand that there is a great deal of difference between merely believing Jesus and believing *in* him or *on* him.

In most of our English versions this difference is not overly clear in this section of John's Gospel, and in some cases is completely obscured. But in Greek the distinction is plain. In verse 30 of this chapter, John writes of those who really did trust Jesus and who had personally committed themselves to him. John says, "Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him." In the next verse, however, the phrase is changed so that we find ourselves reading of those who merely "believed him." Unfortunately, the Authorized Version and the Revised Standard Version translate the phrases identically (either "believed on" or "believed in"). But the New English Bible, the New American Standard Bible, the New International Version, and others preserve the distinction. The New English Bible is explicit; it says, "As he said this, many put their faith in him. Turning to the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said...." The New International Version says, "Many put their faith in him. To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said... "In other words, the verses distinguish between those listeners who had believed on Jesus unto salvation and those who had merely believed certain things that he had said.

It is worth noting that this contrast—between those who merely believe doctrines and those who believe on Jesus personally—is also made elsewhere. Thus, to give one example, in the sixth chapter we find Jesus calling for saving faith by saying, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (v. 29). But then, immediately after, those who

refuse to believe on that level declare, "What miraculous sign will you give then, that we may see and believe?" (v. 30).

Someone will say, "But is it really possible to believe certain things about Christ or to believe him and yet fail to believe on him?" Yes, of course it is. What is more, we have examples of precisely this failure. One example is Judas, one within the very limited and privileged circle of Christ's disciples. Judas obviously believed something about Jesus. He believed enough to be one of the early preachers. When Jesus sent his disciples out two-by-two, Judas undoubtedly went with them. Yet Judas was not a saved man. Simon Magus is another example. We are told that he believed after he had seen the miracles and signs that Peter and the other apostles performed. He was baptized and became a member of the church. But he was not a true believer either and later was rebuked for his unbelief by Peter. The greatest examples of all are the devils who, we are told, "believe and shudder." Each of these believes certain things about Jesus. But they do not believe unto salvation.

It is not saying too much to suggest that there are many such today. If you are one, I want to encourage you to go the whole way and believe *on* Jesus. It would be a pity to believe so much, to believe the doctrines, and yet fall short of salvation.

Back in the nineteenth century there was a famous acrobat, known all over the world. His real name was Jean Francois Gravalet, but he was known by his stage name—Blondin. Born in France in 1824, Blondin became well known in France while still a child. As he grew older his skill plus his flair for the spectacular soon brought him the acclaim of many in Europe and then in America. His most spectacular feats, those that also drew most attention, were his crossings of Niagara Falls on a tightrope 1, 100 feet long and 160 feet above the water. Once he pushed a wheelbarrow across. On another occasion he stopped halfway and cooked an omelet.

Once, in an unusual demonstration of skill, Blondin carried a man across Niagara Falls on his back and then turned around and carried him

back. After he had put his rider down, the acrobat turned to the large crowd that had been watching and asked a man who was near at hand, "Do you believe that I could do that with you?"

"Of course," the man said. "I've just seen you do it."

"Well, hop on," said Blondin, "and I'll carry you across."

The man answered, "Not on your life!"

That is the difference between believing something on the intellectual level only and believing in the sense of belief that the Bible calls for when it asks us to believe on Christ. To believe in the biblical sense is to commit yourself to Christ, to trust him to carry you over the churning cataracts and wild whirlpools of life. The other belief is only intellectual assent. God wants the first kind of belief. And yet—this is the point that we need to fix clearly in our minds—Jesus' words were directed not to those who had believed properly, but rather to those who had believed only on the inadequate, intellectual level. It was to these, the weak in faith, that he said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

An Eye for Faith

This fact leads us naturally to the second point, which is the most important. The point is simply that Jesus takes notice of even this inadequate faith and seeks to encourage it. Intellectual belief is not saving faith, but saving faith may come from such beginnings. Therefore, Jesus spoke to those who only believed his teachings and tried to lead them farther.

Spurgeon once wrote on this subject: "It is written, 'When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?' Certainly He can find it if anyone can. He has a very quick eye for faith. He deals with little faith as we used to do with a spark in the tinder, in the days of our boyhood. When we had struck a spark, and it fell into the tinder—though it was a very tiny one—we watched it eagerly, we blew upon it softly, and we were zealous to increase it, so that we might kindle our match thereby.

When our Lord Jesus sees a tiny speck of faith in a man's heart, though it be quite insufficient of itself for salvation, yet he regards it with hope, and watches over it, if, haply, this little faith may grow to something more. It is the way of our compassionate Lord not to quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed."

While Jesus does not disparage small faith, neither does he praise it. Jesus speaks to these who have believed with the head only, but he does so by leading off with a conditional sentence. "If... ," he says, "*if* you hold to my teaching." True, he does not send them away. But neither does he promise the blessings of the Christian life outright. Rather, there is a task to do, a word to be learned. "You believe something," he seems to say, "believe more; continue in my word until you come at last to rest in me as your Savior."

It often has seemed to me that in these words Jesus was saying something similar to what he was saying in that oft-quoted challenge from the Sermon on the Mount—"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it" (Matt. 7:13). Many have taken this verse to mean that salvation is something to be worked for or else something to be carefully guarded lest through some slip of sin the Christian wanders off the path of salvation and is lost eternally. But it does not mean that. The point of the verse is seen rather in its historical context. Here, early in his ministry, Jesus was speaking to people who as yet had no knowledge of his coming death and resurrection and, of course, were not saved. They believed him (as did those about whom John is writing), but the events upon which salvation depended were yet three years away. In between were years of discouragement in which the early enthusiasm of the Galilean ministry would give way to hostility and eventual persecution. What was to happen to these people during the intervening years? Were they, too, to become discouraged? Were they to drop away? Clearly, Jesus was encouraging them to keep on the narrow way of his teaching until at last, with the cross behind them, they could pass through himself, the narrow door, into salvation.

In precisely the same manner Jesus is also, here in John, encouraging his listeners not to become discouraged by the difficulty of attending to his words or to be offended by what they hear him say. Rather, they are to continue on until, being encouraged by God's grace, they are enabled to embrace Jesus personally as their Savior. Perhaps Jesus is speaking in this manner to you. If so, remember that today you do not have to wait three years to believe or even a moment. Believe now. Commit yourself to Jesus Christ and start on that road of true discipleship that you will follow to your life's end.

Encouragements to Keep On

Are you hesitating? If so, notice that Jesus does not stop speaking to those who had merely believed him after he had encouraged them to continue in his word. He encouraged them to continue; that is true. But he also goes on to provide them with inducements in order that this might surely come about. There are three of them.

First, Jesus said to those Jews who had believed him, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples." That is, he promised them a *verified discipleship.* They would not be disciples in word only, as so many are who are in our churches today, but they would be true disciples. Some who are in our churches profess to be disciples of Christ, but you never know it until they tell you. You can know them for years and never observe a decision or an action that is distinctly Christian or never hear a distinctly Christian word. This is not being a disciple. Do not be a parttime, hit-or-miss believer. Be a thoroughbred. The first inducement is that by continuing in Christ's Word you will be such a disciple.

The second inducement is that you will know the truth. It is the promise that you will have *certain knowledge* in spiritual things. You will not know all things, of course. Only God knows all things. But what you do know will be certain. I am sorry for those for whom all things are in flux. They think that they believe so-and-so; but then, if conditions change, they might not believe it. Or again, if they are challenged, they change their mind. This is a particularly common situation in our day,

because we live in an age in which most people consider truth to be relative. This means that there are no absolutes in this or any other area. You may think you have a certain truth, but that is only truth for you, not necessarily truth for me. Or it may only be truth for now, but not for days to come. What a sad situation! What a pathetic condition! This is not what Christ promises. Jesus promises truth and the certainty of it.

Finally, Jesus promises that *you will be set free.* "The truth will set you free." Jesus himself will set you free; and therefore your freedom will be on a higher and greater level than that which men can offer.

For one thing, it will not be freedom in name only. Once I was told of an interview that some Christians in Hong Kong had conducted with an eighty-two-year-old woman who had shortly before been released from China. She was a Christian, but her vocabulary was filled with much of the terminology of Communism. "When you were back in China, were you free to gather together with other Christians to worship?" they asked her.

"Oh, no," she answered. "Since the liberation no one is permitted to gather together for Christian services."

"But surely you were able to get together in small groups and discuss the Christian faith?"

"No, we were not," the woman replied. "Since the liberation all such meetings are forbidden." "Were you free to read your Bible?"

"Since the liberation no one is free to read the Bible." The point of this story is obvious. Freedom does not consist in the word "freedom" (liberation) alone, but in the reality that only the truth of God brings. Moreover, it is a positive freedom. In Christ we are set free from three terrible masters: sin, self, and Satan. We are set free from them to serve Jesus. Have you experienced such freedom? You can, if you will continue in Christ's Word and come to believe *on* him.

Chapter 106.
Free Indeed!

John 8:33-36

Ever since the early Anglo-Saxon dialects gave their formative influence to the English language, the words "free" and "freedom" have been important to the Western world and its culture. Unfortunately, there has not always been agreement on what freedom means. In his speech on the four freedoms, given on January 6, 1941, Franklin Delano Roosevelt spoke largely of human rights: "Freedom of speech and expression—everywhere in the world... freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world... freedom from want... and freedom from fear—everywhere in the world." William Murray, the first Earl of Mansfield, England, wrote in the eighteenth century, "To be free is to live under a government by law."

Others of a more rebellious disposition have spoken of freedom as an escape from law. In American culture, the predominant idea associated with the concept of freedom is freedom from unjust oppression. This significant idea is captured in that well-known inscription found on the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor:

> Give me your tired, your poor,
> Your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free.

What is freedom? Or, more particularly, what does the Bible mean by freedom? At this point we can hardly escape either this question or the answer, for our text in the eighth chapter of John's Gospel involves a statement in which Jesus claimed to be able to set men free. His exact words were, "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (v. 36). In this context two answers are given to the question, "What is freedom?"—first, freedom from ignorance, and second, freedom from sin. Moreover, we are told that a person becomes free only through Christ, through the truth that he brings and through the redemption that he achieved at Calvary.

Freedom from Ignorance

In the first place, the freedom of which the Bible speaks is a freedom from ignorance, by which is meant primarily an ignorance of spiritual things. This is clear from the verse that immediately precedes our section. In that verse Jesus had said to his opponents, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (vv. 31-32).

We are all aware of bondage where natural ignorance is concerned. Someone who does not know is limited. An individual with no education has certain doors barred. The professions are closed. Such a person can do manual, but not white collar, work. An illiterate person faces even more closed doors and will have difficulty obtaining any but the most menial forms of employment. Our country recognizes the truth of these things and therefore, as a general rule, stresses education.

But if this is true on the purely natural level, it is at least equally true or even more true spiritually. A man who does not know the teachings of the Word of God cannot thrive spiritually. A man who does not know the fundamental truths of the Christian faith cannot come to Jesus Christ for salvation.

The really upsetting thing about this situation, however, is that many persons who are not knowledgeable about Christian truth and who are therefore bound by their ignorance are nonetheless unaware that they are ignorant and so resist any attempt to help them to become free. They are like stubborn children. No one blames a child for not knowing all that an adult knows, but at least one expects a child to be willing to learn. If he is not willing, something is wrong. Many persons are like this spiritually.

We do not have to go far for an example either, for one is found in the verses we are studying. Jesus had spoken of freedom to those who were listening to him. But no sooner had he mentioned the word "free" than they reacted violently. Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

But when he said that, they immediately responded, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" (v. 33). This was patently ridiculous, of course. For years the Jews had been slaves in Egypt. During the period of the Judges there were at least seven occasions when the nation fell under foreign rule. Later there was the seventy-year-long Babylonian captivity. Even as they were talking to Jesus, these men carried coins in their pockets that bore the image of the Roman emperors and thereby testified to Rome's dominion. Yet they said, "We have always been free."

We smile at this kind of self-delusion. But it is no more ridiculous than the self-delusion of people who today are slaves to ignorance in spiritual matters but who will not acknowledge their slavery. They do not know God. Yet they think they know all there is to know and so will not learn about Jesus or come to him.

Truth Saves

Thus far we have looked at two reasons why freedom from ignorance is important: first, because knowledge itself is important—a lack of it limits an individual; and second, because we *are* ignorant. There is a third reason also. Freedom from ignorance is important because it is through a knowledge of spiritual truth that God saves people from sin, from themselves, and from Satan.

Let me give you a typical example. Here is a man who, let us say, lives in your city. He is an average sort of person. He has a normal, nine-to-five job. He has a family. On Friday night he bowls with the league. He likes to golf on Sunday. When he is not out doing something else he watches television. It is a normal life, and he is quite happy with it. He seldom thinks of God, and he would not really know what to think about God even if he did think about him. God just does not enter into his thinking.

Someone begins to talk to him about spiritual things, and in the course of time he comes into a situation in which he begins to learn something

of what the Bible teaches. It may be in church. It may be in a home Bible study. It may be through listening to the radio or through reading Christian books. He begins to learn a few basic truths. The first thing he learns is that he is a sinner. Before this he had always thought he was all right because he had never cheated on his wife or robbed anyone. Now he learns that sin is being less perfect than God and that it is seen in such things as pride, selfishness, anger, and worry. For the first time in his life he begins to be disturbed. He learns that God is a God of judgment and that there is a judgment day coming. This really disturbs him. He had never thought of the fact that one day he might have to give an account of what he has done in this life. Now he finds himself lying awake at night thinking about death and what lies beyond it. Finally, this man hears about the death of the Lord Jesus Christ—how he died for his people and how he loves them. These truths now grip him as forcefully as the thought of judgment had gripped him before, and he finds himself calling on Christ in order that he might be saved. The truth of Christianity, made meaningful to him and applied to his heart by the Holy Spirit, saves him. The truth has set him free.

This can be your experience. Are you one who has heard the truths of Christianity and who needs to come to Jesus Christ as your Savior? You can come now. You do not need to do anything but commit your life to him. Believe these truths: you are a sinner; there is a judgment day coming; Jesus died for your sin. Stand firm upon these truths! Do not linger any longer in the bondage of spiritual ignorance!

Freedom from Sin

Second, the Lord Jesus Christ spoke of a freedom from sin. This is involved in verse 34, where Jesus declares, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin." Notice that Jesus is not talking about the penalty of sin in this verse. It is not that we are to be set free from sin's penalty. Jesus is talking about sin's power, about the hold that sin has over us, about a defeated Christian life. His point is that he can set a person free from this bondage also.

Are you one who desires such freedom? Probably you have a measure of freedom now. Since coming to Christ you have been free of the fear of judgment. You do not fear death. The guilt of sin does not weigh heavily upon you. You feel that you are free to grow in the knowledge of Christ almost indefinitely. And yet, there is a sin that you cannot seem to shake. You have a temper; you cannot control it. You offend people by your thoughtlessness. You are caught in some sexual sin and cannot escape it. I do not know what the particular point of defeat is in your life, but I do know that Jesus is himself the answer to that defeat. Allow him to free you. Come to him! Learn about him! Call upon him! Claim his promises! He said, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

Moreover, there is a role that Christians have in helping others to achieve this freedom. Beyond any doubt, there are some things that God does alone. Bringing new life into a dead soul is one of them. None of us can cause a person to be born again. God alone must do it. But once God has made a person alive, then there is work that God gives us so that we might share in the other's full salvation.

Let me give some biblical examples. When the Lord Jesus Christ brought his friend Lazarus back from the dead, it was the Lord himself who called him: "Lazarus, come out." But after he had brought Lazarus forth, still wrapped in grave clothes, his next words were to those who stood about, by which he invited them to have a hand in Lazarus's full liberation: "Loose him, and let him go." When God called the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus, it was God alone who called him and who brought forth new life in Paul. The others who were with Paul did not even hear the words God spoke. Nevertheless, when Paul had been brought into Damascus, Ananias was then used to visit and baptize Paul that he might receive his sight. God used Philip to bring the light of the gospel to the Ethiopian. He used Priscilla and Aquila to bring a fuller understanding of the truth to Apollos. In the same way, each Christian has a ministry in the life of a person or persons.

Are you saying, as many do, "But I do not have the gift of helping"? If you are, I cannot believe you. Every Christian can do something, for

God has given every Christian at least one gift. Most can do much more than they are doing, including some things that they did not think they could do.

Howard G. Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary tells in a recent book of a conversation he once had with a man whom he wanted to involve in Christian work. He wanted him to conduct a home Bible class. "Wow," the man objected, "I don't have the gift of teaching."

"How do you know, Bill?" Hendricks replied. "Did God let down a sheet from heaven one night and tell you that?"

"No," he acknowledged, "I just don't have it."

"Have you ever taught?"

"No, I've never taught."

"Then don't tell me you don't have the gift of teaching, my friend, because you don't know that," Hendricks answered. The man thought a bit and eventually agreed to teach. "Today," says the author, "if I want to send my students to see a man who knows how to communicate a lot better than most professionals, I send them out to hear Bill!"

Perhaps you are saying, "But that was Bill. I know I don't have the gift of teaching. I really do know it! What can I do?" Let me take you to another New Testament story. Do you remember the prodigal son?

When the prodigal came home, it was the father who met him. He did not say to the servants, "Go and meet him." The father himself went, and threw his arms about his son's neck and kissed him. The father personally forgave him and restored him to his home. Nevertheless, after he had done this the father then turned to the servants who stood by and said to them, "Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate." My point is that the servants had work in each of these four areas.

First, they were to bring the best robe and put it on the young man. That makes an illustration of good Christian teaching. Robes in Scripture often speak of Christ's righteousness. So we have a role in actually helping to put Christ's righteousness upon the sinner. We are not content merely to preach Christ. We want men to put him on, and we want to help them do it. God uses many, like Bill, in this work of teaching and evangelism.

Second, they were to put a ring on his hand. This speaks of fellowship. Many who cannot teach nevertheless can do this work simply by getting to know others who have become Christians, becoming friends with them, and including them in Christian activities.

Third, the servants were to put shoes on the prodigal's feet. There were roads to be walked, and shoes were necessary. In a similar way some can help others to prepare for life's journey. And as for the preparation of the fatted calf and the rejoicing, well, there are babes in Christ to be fed and many to be cheered and made welcome. There is plenty to be done. Each Christian has a responsibility to help others in God's service.

For Saints and Sinners

If you are not a Christian, then you must respond to Christ's offer of freedom at once without delaying. There is a verse in this section of John that is for you. It is the verse in which Jesus says, somewhat enigmatically, "Now a slave has no permanent place in the house; but a son belongs to it forever" (v. 35). The contrast is between a son, who is the inheritor of the father's property and whose rights cannot be denied or taken away, and a slave who, although he may enjoy some of the privileges of being in the same house as the son, nevertheless can be sold at any time and thus lose his privileges. Obviously this applied to Christ's hearers, who were Jews but who were not God's sons by the new birth. They had all the privileges of being Jews, but unless they came to Christ for salvation the privileges would not last forever. The day would come when even Jerusalem would be destroyed and the Jews would be scattered.

Opportunity does not last forever for anyone. It will not last forever for you if you are not yet a Christian. Christ offers you freedom now—freedom from ignorance and freedom from sin's power. You are in a place where you can hear the gospel, question Christian friends, observe Christianity. Who knows when such things may change? You may have to move to another city. You may get sick. Eventually you will die. Now is the time to believe.

Finally, there is also an application for those who have already received Christ as Savior. Have you been set free from ignorance and from sin? If so, there is work to do, for you have not been set free to be idle. You are set free to serve God. If you are a Christian, God wants you to follow him in Christian service. For this *is* freedom. It is freedom indeed!

Chapter 107.
Sons of Abraham

John 8:37-40

That a personal commitment to Jesus Christ is necessary in order to become a Christian is an idea totally alien to the thinking of many people. Yet it is true, and it needs to be stressed in our day. A number of years ago my wife and I were dealing with an English woman who had been raised in a religious home. She was not a Christian, but she thought she was. Her father had been a vestryman in the Church of England. From the earliest years she had been brought to Sunday school. She once sang in the choir. In one sense, she even believed all that the Church of England taught, for—although she did not know much—she would never have thought of disagreeing with the Thirty-Nine Articles or with anything in the Prayer Book. For her, to be an English woman was to be a member of the Church of England, and to be a member of the church was to be a Christian. It was a matter of tradition. It was not until we had spoken to her for some time that she

discovered the reality of Christianity and committed her life to Jesus Christ personally.

That story is not an unusual one, of course. But it is an important one, if only because the experience I have described is so common. People consider themselves Christians largely because they have had a Christian father or mother, or because they were raised in a Christian church, or just because there has never been any other religious tradition in their background. If you are one for whom the Christian faith consists largely of such things, you should look closely at these very important verses from John's Gospel.

An Inconsistency

The verses are found in the eighth chapter, and they concern the reaction of certain leaders of the Jewish people to Jesus. Jesus had been talking to these men about spiritual things. But whenever he suggested that there might be a lack in their lives (which he could fill), they reacted violently and defensively. Toward the end of the chapter we find that they went so far as to attempt to stone him. It is a pity that they reacted in this way, of course. It is an even greater pity that men and women often act this way today. Yet it is human nature. Even the most miserable people will react defensively at any suggestion that their lives could be made better.

These men countered Christ's suggestion that they needed something by the claim that they had all they needed through their religious traditions. They traced their ancestry to Abraham claiming that they were all right because "we are Abraham's descendants." God's promises were made to Abraham and to his descendants (Gen. 17:7; 22:16-18). They had descended from Abraham physically. Therefore, they reasoned, we are blessed in Abraham, and there is nothing for us to worry about spiritually.

What did Jesus do when faced by this reply? He made a number of penetrating statements that should have helped these men to understand the true state of affairs and that should help us today.

The first statement was that *there was a strange inconsistency in their lives.* It was an inconsistency between what they professed to be and what they actually were. On the one hand, they were professing to be religious people. Abraham was a man approved by God. He walked with God. He was praised by God. They claimed that this was true of them. Yet, as Jesus pointed out, they sought "to kill him" and thus demonstrated that his "word had no place" in them. Neither of these facts was true of Abraham.

Let us apply this observation of the Lord Jesus Christ to our day. Here is a man or woman— perhaps it is you—who thinks that he is a Christian but to whose way of life Christianity makes little difference. I will not say, though it might be more true than we realize, that, if Christ were actually on the earth physically, you would try to "kill" him. But perhaps you try to kill him where you individually are concerned—by keeping him out of your life. You say you are a Christian, but you have no room in your life for the One who founded Christianity. You believe he lived and died. Perhaps you even believe that he rose again. But it makes no difference to you. Nothing about your life is changed because of him.

It also is true that his word does not abide in you. I do not mean by this that you have never heard or even been able to memorize some of Christ's teachings, though if you think the words "God helps those who help themselves" are in the Bible, you know less of his teachings than you think. But I do mean to say that they are not enough a part of you to affect your decisions. Someone plays a dirty trick on you, and you play one back. "'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" means nothing to you. When you come home you insult your wife and snap at the children. Christ's commandment that you "love one another" does not enter into your thinking. What of this? Is it not a strange inconsistency? Does it not trouble you? This is not the way of Christ or of those who follow him.

What Is Your Ancestry?

Second, Jesus went on to explain the cause of this inconsistency. It was explained by the true ancestry of these religious leaders. They claimed a natural or physical descent from Abraham, and on this level their claim was quite valid. The difficulty was that their descent from Abraham was only physical; that is, it was external rather than internal, natural rather than spiritual. On the spiritual level (about which Jesus was concerned), their ancestry was something quite different. It was—we must be bold enough to say it—demonic. Spiritually *they were children of their true father, the devil.*

Let me say at once that in its full sense this is not true of most people. Sometimes preachers speak of there being two families in this world—the family of God and the family of the devil— and they imply that if one does not serve God he serves Satan. This is not true in the full sense, but (I must repeat) only in the full sense. Actually, most people serve themselves and are no more interested in serving Satan than they are in serving God. These men were apparently Satan's tools in a way that most people would not be. They proved it by their concerted and vicious efforts to kill God.

On the other hand, there is a sense in which all that is not of God can be traced to Satan, for it was through Satan that sin first entered the universe. Do you sin? Do you find yourself flashing out in anger against someone else? Do you ever exploit someone else? Do you put yourself first in business or in your marriage and allow others to come second? If this is so, then in one sense at least you are demonstrating a demonic ancestry. Such things do not come from the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus taught this truth in a parable once, pointing out that good fruit does not come from a bad tree. It takes a good tree to produce it. Similarly, bad fruit does not come from a good tree. A bad tree creates it. In the same way, you can come to know the true nature of your spiritual family tree by the fruit found on it. What is the fruit in your life? How about your speech? How about your actions? It is interesting that Jesus called attention to both these areas in speaking to the Jewish rulers. For he said, making the contrast between what is of God and

what is of Satan, "I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father" (v. 38).

Born Again

The obvious conclusion to this study is that, if a person is to be taken out of the family of Satan and into the family of God, he must experience what he would have to experience if this were true physically. What would you have to do to get out of one family and into another? The answer is that you would have to die to the one family and be born again into another. This cannot be done physically, of course. It is only a theoretical argument. But the glory of the Christian gospel is that it can be done spiritually. It is possible to be born again through the work of God's Holy Spirit and on the basis of Christ's death on the cross.

Before we can make this point, however—before we can say that a man *can* be born again—we must make the equally important point that a man *must* be born again and that this is true because no mere physical birth can save him.

This point is made at two other very important places in the Bible. First, it was made by John the Baptist. John had been preaching in the wilderness of Judea and many had come to him for baptism. Some of them had not repented. So John said to these, "And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matt. 3:9-10). John was telling these men that only an act of God, by which they would become reborn and begin to bring forth good fruit, would save them.

The second important statement of this same point is in the letter of Paul to the Galatians. In one sense the whole letter is a statement of it. Teachers had come to the Galatian churches from Jerusalem saying that one could be saved only by first becoming a Jew, a child of Abraham. It was all right to have Christ, but there must be Abraham too. Faith was

all right, but there must also be law. There must be a physical ancestry. In this case, Paul replied to the doctrine so strongly that he actually said, "If you let yourselves be circumcised [that is, become a Jew in order to acquire Jewish ancestry], Christ will be of no value to you at all" (Gal. 5:2). Nothing matters but becoming "a new creation" in Christ (Gal. 6:15).

Are you a new creation in Christ? Have you been born again into God's family? On one occasion Jesus spoke to a man who had every advantage that ancestry and religious tradition could bring. His name was Nicodemus. He was a Jew, a teacher, a man of influence and prestige. Yet Jesus said, "You must be born again" (John 3:7). This is God's work, but it conies about as a man or woman begins to turn his or her back on any advantage supposedly derived from man and instead begins to draw near to Christ, trusting him for salvation. True children of God are not those with an impeccable religious ancestry, but rather those who believe as Abraham believed and who obey as Abraham obeyed.

The Example of Abraham

The final point of Jesus' reply to these religious leaders was that in spite of all he had said, it was still possible for them to learn from their ancestry if they would only do it. To be sure, this is not said directly. But it seems to be implied in Christ's final reference to Abraham. Jesus pointed out that it was because they did not like what he said that they were trying to kill him. Then he added, "Abraham did not do such things" (v. 40). Granted that Abraham did not seek to have Christ killed and did not reject him, what, then, did he do? The answer seems to be that he received the word of God readily and trusted God for his salvation.

I am not sure of this next point, but it seems to me that Jesus probably was thinking of a specific incident from Abraham's life as he said this. Do you remember the story in which three supernatural beings came to Abraham to warn him of the pending destruction of Sodom (Genesis 18)? These messengers are described in a strange way. Sometimes they

are described as three beings. Sometimes they are described as one. Their words sometimes are prefaced with the statement, "The Lord said." Who were these beings? Who was this person? At the least we are dealing with angels, but they are not called angels. Some, therefore, have speculated that this was a preincarnate manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ himself and that Abraham, therefore, literally saw the Lord Jesus.

If this is true—and I believe it may well be—then Abraham literally did the opposite of what these religious leaders were doing and many persons do today. The leaders were rejecting Jesus. Abraham, on the other hand, ran to him and entreated him to come into his tent. Let me make it personal. Do you have an ancestor who was a genuine believer in the Lord Jesus? Do you trace your religious feelings to some genuine experience by one who is or was close to you? If you do, this is not entirely bad. But you must not trust to the relationship only. You must do as he or she did. You must do as Abraham. Do you have a godly father? Then do as he did and follow Jesus. Do you have a praying mother? Then do as she does and pray to Jesus that your sins might be forgiven and that you might become his follower. No one wants to be a hypocrite. You do not want to be one. See to it that you make what you have been professing to be actually true in your experience.

Run to Jesus! Welcome Jesus! Invite him in, and not just into your tent or house but into your life as well. You will find that he will bless you and that he will teach you wonderful things about his will and ways, just as the heavenly messenger taught Abraham.

A Word for Christians

There is a final word for Christians. This study has dealt largely with the strange inconsistency of someone professing to be a believer while he or she is not and, actually, betrays that fact by conduct. But another and even stranger inconsistency exists when those who really are Christians do not display Christ-like conduct. This is often true, of course. There is a reason for it.

Christians do not lose their old nature merely by becoming Christians. The old nature will assert itself; but while it is true that it happens, it still should not be characteristic of the Christian's behavior. The Christian should reveal the hand of Christ in his life.

Years ago a young dental student studied in Philadelphia under a dentist who was known for the perfect way in which he made amalgam fillings. He made them so well they looked like inlays, which are normally much harder to make and more expensive. The fillings were so good that the dentist was known as "the amalgam king." Well, the time came when the young student finished his course and was drafted into the army. In the army he did dental work and eventually ended up on the west coast, three thousand miles from his home city of Philadelphia. One day a draftee came into his office for some work, and the young man who had studied in Philadelphia began to examine the fillings. Suddenly he straightened up and asked, "Do you come from Philadelphia?" "Yes," he was told.

"I thought so," the young dentist said. "Your work has been done by Dr. Ward C. Miller, the amalgam king."

I am sure you can see the application. In this life it will never be true that every aspect of our lives will reveal the touch of the Lord Jesus Christ, but there must be some areas that can be identified as his workmanship. Others should be able to point to you and say, "It is the work of Jesus Christ, the great physician. It is the work of the King."

Chapter 108.
That Other Family

John 8:41-50

I do not know who first originated the popular phrase "the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man," but I suspect that it is a product of nineteenth-century liberalism. I know that it is not

a proper expression of true Christianity. The phrase sounds good. It suggests that all men are really brothers despite their differences and that all worship the same God regardless of the different names they give to him. But that is just not true, and both the Word of God and history refute it. The true picture is presented in the verses to which we come in this study.

A Heightened Debate

We can recall from previous studies that the debate between Jesus and the religious leaders had been growing more and more intense. This has already been seen in the actions of these men, as well as in their speech. Now, even their speech becomes more strident. They had begun by claiming to be Abraham's seed; that is, descendents of the man whom God had promised to bless as the father of a special people and who was to be a blessing to many. But after Jesus had disputed their claim, they intensified it, saying then that they were actually the children of God (v. 41). On his part, Jesus also intensified his denial. He had begun by denying that they were Abraham's seed spiritually. He adds to that a denial that they are God's children. Finally, he says openly that they actually are children of their true father, the devil.

The reaction to this last statement must have been intense. So we are not surprised to find these leaders taking up stones to try to kill him just a few verses later. These words stirred their indignation, as Christ knew they would. But they were the truth. They had to be said whether or not the men were offended.

It is the same today, of course. For if a desire not to offend men were the measure of what could be taught, little of the teaching of the Word of God could be communicated. Years ago an evangelist went to a little town in Nevada to hold meetings. When he met the minister of the church in which the meetings were to be held, he was told, "Now, my friend, I want to tell you that there are certain things you must not say here and certain sins about which you must not speak. For instance, it would never do for you to talk about divorce; this is the divorce capital of America, and many of our people have been married and divorced

several times. They are sensitive on that issue. You cannot talk about drinking, for that is a big business here. Don't mention gambling."

The poor evangelist looked at the minister and asked, "Well, of whose sins may I speak?"

"Go for the sins of the Piute Indians," he was told. "They never go to church anyway."

There are truths that need to be stated whether or not men and women are offended. Since Jesus knew this, he spoke the truth here. From our point of view it is good that he did, for as a result of it we have in these verses the clearest teachings about Satan and of the truth that God is not the father of all men and that all are not brothers that is to be found in John's Gospel. Actually, there is only one other place in the Gospel where Satan is even mentioned, and that does not tell us much about him. It is where we are told that the devil entered into Judas Iscariot (13:2, 27).

A Personal Devil

What do these verses tell us about Satan? First of all, they tell us that there is a devil—a real one because he is not a figment of human imagination, and a personal one because he is not merely some vague, abstract idea of evil. Jesus indicates this when he speaks of the devil by name and refers to him with the personal pronoun "he."

The idea of a personal devil has been denied by large segments of the Christian church, of course, and has become almost a laughing matter in current society. Due to the revival of witchcraft and Satanism in recent years, it is perhaps not so much a laughing matter as previously. Still many would regard thoughts about there being a real devil as hardly serious. In the popular mind the devil is a funny little man dressed up in long red underwear, with horns and a tail. And "since I could never believe in a funny little man in red underwear, with horns and a tail," so the argument goes, "I could never believe in a devil." Few who think this way see that this is quite a different image of Satan from that

portrayed in the Bible, and even fewer (including Christians) recognize the picture of a little man with horns as Satan's stratagem.

In writing to the Corinthians on one occasion the apostle Paul noted that we are not ignorant of Satan's schemes (2 Cor. 2:11). The word "scheme" means a trick, plot, contrivance, or stratagem. So the point is that Christians know, or should know, about Satan's tricks for seeking to blind men's minds and secure them for himself. One of these, which he uses at some points of history, but not at all points, is to make people believe that he does not exist.

The idea of a funny little man with horns has had an interesting development that is connected at one point (wrongly, or course) with the Bible. In the Middle Ages, when most of the people were illiterate and the church used miracle plays to teach basic Bible stories and doctrine, there was a need to make whatever character represented the devil immediately recognizable on the stage. This could not be done by writing; but there was a pagan idea in vogue according to which Satan was somewhat of a monster, with horns, and this form was used. Moreover, this idea of Satan's appearance was assumed to be supported by the Bible. For back in Isaiah, in a prophecy against Babylon, there is mention of a creature that would one day, it is said, roam about over the fallen and deserted city. The Hebrew word for this animal or creature is *sair*—it means a wild goat— but few knew what it meant. Thus, in some early translations of the Bible it was called a "satyr," one of the half-human, half-bestial figures of mythology. The Bible was thereby assumed to have described a creature like that of the popular Satan figure, and the medieval practice seemed vindicated. In modern times, with an equal lack of support, the devil has been conceived as the sophisticated tempter of the Faust legend or of the popular American stage play and movie *Damn Yankees.*

Since the devil of fiction is so unbelievable as to be almost pathetic, it is no wonder that millions—knowing nothing more than this fiction—discount him. But this is a mistake about which we should be warned. According to Jesus, there is a devil and there are people who follow

him. In fact, he warned his disciples to pray, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:13).

A Fallen Being

Second, Jesus teaches that the devil is a fallen being. He does this in two ways: first, by showing the height from which he fell ("not holding to the truth") and, second, by showing the depths to which he descended ("he is a liar and the father of lies"). It goes along with both points that "he was a murderer from the beginning."

Unfortunately, this point too is rejected by many, assuming that they even believe in a devil. Rather than believing that Satan is a depraved form of what he once was, they prefer to think of him as heroic and more or less as the champion of fallen man. On this point John Milton is probably the biggest offender. For while it is true that in the opening pages of his great epic *Paradise Lost* he does describe the fall of Satan from heaven, it also is true that the greater part of those pages and the first book of the epic describe Lucifer's heroic efforts to rise from the depths of hell and make something of his supposed new kingdom. In Milton's hands he does this brilliantly, so brilliantly, in fact, that some commentators have termed Satan rather than Jesus the book's hero. This is not what Scripture says.

To begin with, Satan has never been in hell and does not control hell. The Bible tells us that God has created hell, preparing it in part for the devil and his angels, and that Satan will one day end up there—although he is not there yet. For another, the Bible describes Satan as at one time being "full of wisdom and perfect in beauty." It says that he was once "in Eden the garden of God," that he was "the anointed cherub," that he was "perfect" in all his ways from the day he was created, until sin was found in him (Ezek. 28:12-15). In Isaiah we are told of his fall through pride and through the arrogant desire to replace God. In that passage Satan says, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High."

God replies that as a result of his sin he will actually be "brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit" (Isa. 14:13-15). This is not the portrait of a heroic being but of a fallen being. It is of one from whom a person should turn in horror.

Moreover, Satan has brought great havoc on the human race. He is a murderer and the author of murder, as Jesus told his listeners. The first crime following the fall of Adam and Eve was a murder, for as a result of the fall Cain slew his brother. Five chapters farther on in John we read that Satan entered into Judas to betray Christ into the hands of his enemies, so that they might kill him. Satan's history is written in blood.

It also is written in deceit, for he is a liar, as Christ said. Satan lied to Eve—"You will not surely die!" (Gen. 3:4). But she did die spiritually and thus lost communion with God. In 1 Kings we read that lying spirits (presumably demons) went forth into the prophets of Ahab so that he would go into battle against the Syrians and be slain at Ramoth-gilead (1 Kings 22:21-23). In Acts we are told that Satan entered into Ananias to cause him to lie about the price of his property, as the result of which he died (Acts 5:3). Satan lies today. Consequently, we are to regard him as dangerous, deceitful, and malicious, but above all as a sinful being and as a failure. He sinned when he failed to remain in his high calling.

A Limited Being

Third, Jesus indicates that Satan is a limited being. That is, he is not omniscient, as God is; he is not omnipotent, as God is; he is not omnipresent, as God is. This is not so explicitly stated in these verses as in other portions of the Bible, but it is implied. For if Satan is a murderer from the beginning, he is limited in the area of the ethical life. If he is a liar and the father of it, he is limited in understanding. If he is to face judgment, as Jesus says next, he obviously is limited in power; for he cannot avoid it. Thus, although we should be aware of Satan and warned about him, we should nevertheless not get into the habit of thinking of the tempter as anything like an evil equivalent of God.

This is worth thinking about in detail. To begin with, Satan is not omniscient. God knows all things, but Satan does not. Above all he does not know the future. No doubt Satan can make shrewd guesses, for he knows the nature of man and the tendencies of history well. The so-called revelations of mediums and fortune-tellers—when they are not outright deceits—fall in this category. But this is not true knowledge of what is to come. Thus, the predictions are vague and generally do not hold water. At one point God stated this in the form of a challenge to all false gods, saying, "'Present your case,' says the LORD. 'Set forth your arguments,' says Jacob's King. 'Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen.... tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear.'" (Isa. 41:21-24).

Neither is Satan omnipotent. Thus, he cannot do everything he wants to do, and, in the case of believers, he can only do what God will permit. The great example here is the case of Job, who was safe until God had first lowered the hedge that he had thrown up about him. Even then God did this for his own worthwhile purposes and kept Job from sinning.

Finally, Satan is not omnipresent, which means that he cannot be everywhere at the same time tempting everyone. God is omnipresent. He can help all who call upon him, all at one time. But Satan must tempt one individual at a time or else operate through one or more of those angels, now demons, who fell with him. The interesting consequence of this fact is that Satan has probably never tempted you or any Christian you know. Even in the Bible we find very few who were tempted by Satan directly. Whom can you think of who was so tempted? There was Eve, of course. Christ was tempted. Peter was tempted. We are told that the devil entered into Ananias to cause him to lie about the price of his land, and into Judas. But that is about all. On one occasion Paul may have been hindered in his plans by Satan (1 Thess. 2:18), but on another it was only a messenger of Satan who buffeted him (2 Cor. 12:7). Similarly, it was only lesser demons who opposed an angel bringing a revelation to Daniel (Dan. 10:13, 20). And, although 2 Kings 6:16 may mean to suggest that a great host of devils,

as well as soldiers, surrounded Elisha at Dothan—outnumbered by the Lord's host, however—Satan himself is not said to have been among them.

This simply means that while the Christian must never ignore or underestimate Satan and his stratagems, neither must he overestimate him. And, above all, he must never do this to the point of taking his eyes away from God. God is our strength and our tower. He limits Satan. Thus, he will never permit a Christian to be tempted above that which he is able and, indeed, will always provide the way of escape that he may be able to bear it (1 Cor. 10:13). As for Satan, his end is in the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41).

Two Ways

There are two ways open before us. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" (Prov. 14:12). This is Satan's way. And there is a "road that leads to life" (Matt. 7:14), which is God's way. The two paths lie before each individual.

On the one path Satan makes his promises. But he is the father of lies, and his words cannot be trusted. He is offering wisdom, as he did to Eve in the garden—"You will be like God, knowing good and evil"—but the wisdom of Satan leads to folly in spiritual things. He is offering love, but the end is hate. He is offering that which is pleasant—"all the kingdoms of the world and their glory"—but the end is torment for those who follow him.

On the other path stands Jesus with his promises. In one sense they are the reversal of Satan's promises. He says. "You are blind!" But he gives sight, and wisdom follows. He has a message of hate. "I hate sin," he declares. But he will turn you from sin and draw you to himself with a great love. Finally, he warns about torment. He has more to say about hell than anyone else in the Bible. But he offers pleasantness to those who follow him. All his ways are "pleasant" and all his "paths are peace" (Prov. 3:17). Will you follow him? Will you commit yourself to him as your Savior?

Chapter 109.
The Last Enemy

John 8:51

Some time ago I received a letter from an eighty-one-year old woman who was afraid to die. She was a Christian and probably should have been less fearful as she drew near the end of her earthly life. But she was still afraid and so expressed openly what many others feel but will not speak of. In view of her fear it was a privilege to show her that spiritual death is conquered and that even physical death may be totally transformed for Christians.

Fear of death lies deep in the heart of many persons, and sometimes it is not so deep. The Bible says, "Dust you are, and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:19). It calls death an enemy. "The last enemy to be destroyed is death," according to Paul's comments on the subject in his first letter to the Corinthians. Poets may make light of death, as did James Russell Lowell, who called death as "beautiful as the feet of a friend, coming to welcome us at our journey's end." But Francis Bacon was closer to the truth when he acknowledged that "men fear death as children fear the dark." Dr. Samuel Johnson, the maker of the dictionary, expressed what many feel when he was confronted by a friend's final illness. "At the sight of this last conflict I felt a sensation never known to me before: a confusion of passions, an awful stillness of sorrow, a gloomy terror without a name."

How comforting in the light of our fears is the promise of Jesus that is the basis of our study. His exact words are, "I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death" (John 8:51). It is a great promise and may be considered in three parts: first, the condition upon which the promise is based; second, the promise itself; third, the assurance that the promise can be trusted.

The Conditions

The first item is the condition upon which the promise is based—"if anyone keeps my word." It is a condition, for when Jesus began the phrase by the word "if he indicated that there is something we must do after which the promise will follow.

We should be glad that he put it as he did, of course. For the offer "if anyone keeps my word" opens the promise to all sorts of people. Next to the terms of this condition other characteristics of a man or woman fade into relative unimportance. A person may be quite weak in faith so that he often is doubting the reality of spiritual things, but if he keeps Christ's saying he will never see death. He may be timid or shy so that he is afraid to express what he actually believes in his heart, but if he keeps Christ's saying he will never see death. He may have been a great sinner before he was found by Christ and saved by him. He may have been a very upright man, even to the degree of being filled with pride at his own high attainments; if he has kept Christ's saying, he will never see death. This is the important point, and it is for this reason that I have repeated it. The condition is: "If anyone keeps my word." Have you kept it? Are you keeping it? If you do, you shall never see death.

I can imagine that someone may be asking, "But what does it mean to keep Christ's word?" It is a good question, and the answer is worth exploring. It means several things.

First, it means that you must *hear Christ's word;* that is, you must hear with understanding. Indeed, how else can a person keep it unless he hears it in the sense of understanding what it means? It is clear that this is involved in Christ's thought because it is expressly stated in the fifth chapter in a verse that is almost an exact parallel of the one here. In that verse Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, whoever *hears* my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (v. 24).

Let me illustrate what is involved in hearing Christ's word. A number of years ago Dennis

Cochrane, a missionary to the Duna Indian tribe of New Guinea, was looking for a word in the Duna language that would convey what the Bible means by faith. The Dunas had a word for faith, but it did not imply the necessary action. Faith is believing God and acting upon that belief. Besides, there did not seem to be any other word that implied action either. Finally, while putting a number of Duna folk tales into written form in order to become better acquainted with the language, Cochrane came across a story in which a small animal, like a squirrel, was chased up a tree by a dog. "I'm going to get you," the dog said. This did not bother the squirrel, however, because it knew that a dog cannot climb trees. The story acknowledged that the squirrel heard the threat, but it was the kind of hearing that allowed the words to go into one ear and out the other. After several more threats and some growling, the dog finally said, "All right, I'm going to get my friend, the...." Here he mentioned an animal that could climb trees. At this point in the story it was said that the squirrel heard the saying in another sense. This time the verb literally meant, "The saying went down into his ears." It got through. As a result, the squirrel started for another area of the forest as soon as the dog left to find the friend who could climb. The last word was the word that Cochrane later used to translate the word "faith," for it means "to hear with understanding and act on it."

It is in this manner that we also are to keep Christ's word. We are to hear it and allow it to sink into our understanding.

Second, to keep Christ's word also means to commit oneself to Christ or to *believe him.* This is involved in the verse from John 5 also, for Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who hears my word and *believes* him who sent me has eternal life." To believe *on* Christ is not just to hear him in the sense that I have been explaining: to understand what he says and to acknowledge that what he says is true. This is good. We must do it. But it is not enough. Even the devils believe in this sense, for the Bible tells us that they believe and tremble. What is needed is a step beyond this—first to believe him and then to believe in the sense of actually committing oneself to him for salvation. To put this in the form of an illustration, we can say that it is the type of belief exercised by a

girl who, in addition to believing the word of a young man, agrees to marry him.

Finally, to keep Christ's word obviously also means to *obey him.* Indeed, this is one of the primary meanings of the word "keep" in this sentence. The other related meaning is that of guarding a prisoner. So the whole idea is to keep Christ's word (and obey it) as carefully as one would guard a criminal entrusted to one's care. Do you keep Christ's word in that sense? Do you hear his word, believe him, and obey his instructions? If not, you need to stop here and examine your relationship to him. For it is to those who do that and only to them that the promise applies.

The Promise

This brings us to the promise itself—"he will never see death." What does this mean? It is obvious that it does not refer to physical death primarily. For Jesus himself died, and since that time all his followers have died. It is true that some may not see death even in this sense; for those who are living at the return of Christ will not die. Still, those are few in number compared with the many others and regardless of that number it is clear that Jesus is not talking primarily of physical death in this saying. Here again, the parallel verse in John 5 is a help to our understanding. There the phrase "will not see death" is paralleled by "has eternal life, and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." In other words, the primary reference is to spiritual death, and the promise is that the one who keeps Christ's word will never experience that final death that is the result of God's judgment.

This becomes clearer when we recognize that death is separation. In physical death the soul and spirit are separated from the body. They go. The body remains behind. In spiritual death the soul and spirit are separated from God. It is the second that is most frightening.

But this is what Jesus removed for all who believe on him. Apart from his death, all would need to experience death in this sense. The Bible says, "The soul who sins is the one who will die" (Ezek. 18:4, 20). It

says, "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). This death is separation from God. It is the direct and inevitable consequence of our sin. But when the Lord Jesus Christ took that separation for us during the hours of darkness when he hung on the cross, he removed this death forever for those who trust him. Now those who trust Christ do not live in fear of it. On the contrary, no longer facing death as separation from God, they sing with Paul, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55).

Let us say, too, that the reality of escape from the second (or spiritual) death also transforms the way in which we look at the first (or physical) death. Why? For this reason: If the grave does not hold terror of judgment, of a judicial separation from God for eternity, then it holds the prospect of a full union with him. And this means that death is a gain, as Paul says in Philippians. To be absent from this life is to be present with God. Thus, although an actual physical death may be accompanied by pain, it always has overtones of glory and is a homecoming. As D. L. Moody died he said, "Is this death? This is not bad; there is no valley. This is bliss. This is glorious." Others have had a similar testimony. Because of Christ's death it is only the shadow of death, rather than the reality, that touches Christians.

Assurance

Finally, I want you to consider the assurance Jesus gives that his words can be trusted. He gives it at the beginning of the verse. The King James Version uses the words "verily, verily." In the Greek the words are "*Amen, amen*."

"*Amen*" is a word that is found in nearly every language of the world, one of the few in that category, though it comes from an original Hebrew verb meaning "to support with the arm" or "carry." In its intransitive form the verb meant "that which is supported" or "that which is shored up." Hence, it came to mean "firm" or "unshakable." The word occurs in this original sense in Isaiah 22:23 in reference to a firm place in a wall, where a nail can be driven.

In time, particularly in biblical language, "*amen*" took on two uses that have since become dominant. First, the word was used of God, as one of his attributes. This is not surprising, of course; for if the word means "that which is unshakable," the reference to God is quite natural.
Thus, we find God spoken of as the Amen, or, as some versions have it, as the God of truth. Isaiah quotes God as saying, in the context of a prophecy of judgment and of faithfulness toward his own, "Whoever invokes a blessing in the land will do so by the God of truth; he who takes an oath in the land will swear by the God of truth. For the past troubles will be forgotten and hidden from my eyes" (Isa. 65:16). Being the Amen, or being faithful, is one of God's great characteristics.

The second use of the word is most common. It is the use of the word by men to and women express agreement with what God is saying. Thus, when the law was read in formal convocation to Israel upon the sides of Mount Gerazim and Mount Ebal shortly after the conquest of Canaan, all the people, we are told, responded by saying, "*Amen*." Thus, too, do we end our prayers; for we thereby express agreement with what is said and reaffirm our faith in God's promises.

When we come to the use of "*amen*" in the New Testament, we find all these characteristics present, but we find something more. This something more is of great importance for Jesus' words in John. In the New Testament the word is found in 127 verses, in some of them more than once since Jesus frequently repeated the word in his use of it. In seventy-six of these, "*amen*" comes at the beginning of the sentence, and in each case—this is the new point—it is God who is speaking. In forty-eight other verses "*amen*" occurs at the end of the sentence, and in these cases man is speaking. This thought is tremendous, for it means that when God speaks, God prefaces his remarks with the affirmation that what he says is truthful. "I do solemnly affirm that what I am about to say is true," says God. After he says it his people then use the word as an echo ("*Amen*"), by which they mean, "We acknowledge and believe that God is faithful."

The truth of God is the foundation of all truth and of all life. The superstructure is our faith in his reliability. He says, "*Amen*." We echo,

"*Amen, amen*."

"I tell you the truth [the Greek words are literally, "*Amen, amen*"], everyone who sins is a slave to sin," Jesus says just a few verses earlier in the chapter (8:34). We hear his statement, and our hearts sadly echo, "*Amen, amen*. "Jesus says, "I tell you the truth [*amen, amen*], unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (6:53). We say, "*Amen, amen*." "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep" (10:7). "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (5:24). "I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death" (8:51). To these great sayings our hearts echo, "*Amen*."

One final verse suggests the result of this great *Amen* that begins with God and is answered by our hearts. In Isaiah 28:16 there is a verse which says, "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone...
the one who trusts will never be dismayed." The last phrase, "will never be dismayed," really means "will not be confused and thereby make run away." The promise is that the one who believes in Christ will not do this. You say, "But what does that have to do with the theme we are studying?" It has this to do with it: the word translated "trust" is actually the word "*amen*" in its verbal form. So God is actually saying that the one who puts his amen to God's declaration of truth will not fall into confusion and flight.

"*Amen,*" says God, as he lays the foundation. "*Amen*," say his people, as we build upon him. This is the secret of assurance and confidence in all things of the Christian life, including the confrontation of death, the last enemy. "I tell you the truth, whoever keeps my word, he will never see death." *Amen* and *amen*.

Chapter 110.
Christ and Abraham

John 8:52-56

We are coming to the end of the conversation that took place between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day, as recorded in John 8. Consequently, we are coming to the end of a very important section of John's Gospel.

The early chapters of John (chapters 1-4) have served mainly to introduce the Lord Jesus Christ. In those chapters the reception of Jesus by the people of his day was for the most part favorable; at least, there was no hostile reaction. In the present section (chapters 5-8), this initially open reception turns to one of increasing hatred on the part of the leaders, as we have seen. Thus, these chapters begin with the controversy over the sabbath and end with the conversation, recorded in John 8, which we have been studying.

In this conversation the leaders have increasingly expressed their hostility toward Jesus. For his part, Jesus has been increasingly clear about their true ancestry. In both cases, the conversation has centered around the personality and example of Abraham, so much so, that Abraham is mentioned either by the religious leaders or by Jesus eleven times in the chapter. This is doubly remarkable in that he is mentioned nowhere else in John's Gospel.

The example of Abraham was originally raised in verse 33. The leaders had made a claim. They said, "We are Abraham's descendants," meaning that they based their confidence in the matter of salvation on their relationship to Abraham. God had promised to bless Abraham and his seed, and they were Abraham's seed physically. "Therefore," they reasoned, "we are blessed, and there is nothing for us to worry about." Against this kind of fallacious spiritual reasoning, Jesus went on to point out that what matters with God is not physical but spiritual descent. The question that he asked was, "Are you descended from Abraham spiritually? Do you do as Abraham did?"

This point is particularly prominent in the verses to which we come now. They thus especially lead us to consider Abraham's example.

Granted that physical descent is not the important thing! Granted that God is not impressed with family trees! But what is he impressed with? Or, to put it in better language, what did Abraham do that pleased God? On the basis of this and other passages we may answer: (1) Abraham put the calling of God above earthly honors; (2) Abraham believed God in spite of circumstances; and (3) Abraham placed his ultimate hope in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he rejoiced in his coming.

The Calling of God

First of all, then, Abraham put the calling of God above earthly honors. There were honors to be obtained in this life, for Abraham was rich and undoubtedly prominent, first, in Ur of the Chaldees and, second, in Haran. But these did not detain him. When God called he immediately left the past behind and set out for the land God was showing him.

The story is told in the twelfth chapter of Genesis in these words: "The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'" (Gen. 12:1-4).

This is very appropriate to the theme of John 8, as also to the bigger problem of why so many people are unwilling to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. Here were prominent religious figures who were anxious to retain their own honor. And here was Jesus, who was honored by God in such a way that their little earthly honors seemed tawdry by comparison. They had honor, but he spoke the truth. They had power, but he was able to make the blind see and the lame walk.

Moreover, he honored God by knowing and obeying him (v. 55).

"Who do you think you are?" they asked. The question must have been asked in an insulting way, for they were implying that he wrongly was making himself greater than Abraham, their patriarch, or the prophets who had followed him.

Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word" (vv. 54-55).

These men were concerned with earthly honors. So against this background Abraham becomes an example of a man who sought the honor that comes from God only. How wise this is! All true honor must come from God; all other honor is meaningless and passing. On this point Barclay writes perceptively, "It is not difficult to honor oneself. One can quite easily surround oneself with a kind of synthetic halo. It is easy enough—in fact, it is fatally easy—to bask in the sunshine of one's own approval. It is not overly difficult to win honor from men. The world honors the successful and the ambitious man. But the real honor is the honor which only eternity can reveal; and the verdicts of eternity are not the verdicts of time."

How does this apply to us? In this way. When a Christian sets out to follow the call of God in his life, as Abraham did, he will certainly hear discouraging words from the world. "What do you want to do that for?" he will be asked. "Don't you know that you might have to become a missionary? Think of all the good times you'll have to give up. Don't you know that you will never get ahead in this life like that?" The comments are endless. But the Christian must simply say, "That may be true or not. I do not know. What I do know is that I have determined to place the calling of God above earthly honors."

This was the example of Abraham. For this he was commended by God. "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:8-10).

Faith over Circumstances

Second, Abraham believed God in spite of circumstances, and they were difficult circumstances too. For one thing, there were famines in Abraham's new land. The Bible says that one famine was "grievous." At this point Abraham did not do so well, for he left the land of promise to go to Egypt. But he gradually learned to trust God through such experiences. There were also family problems in one of which Lot, his nephew, separated from Abraham and took all the good land for himself. Abraham remained in the less attractive, mountainous region, but he kept closer to God. There was constant danger from marauding desert bands. On one occasion four of these combined to attack the cities of the valley of Sodom and succeeded in carrying off Lot and his family. Abraham pursued these kings and recovered both the family and the spoils. In all these trials Abraham's faith grew in spite of circumstances.

By far the greatest trial of Abraham's faith, and the one in which his faith shines brightest at this period, was God's challenge to him to believe that he could give him a son. At first this did not seem to be a promise calling for great faith, for Abraham expected to have children. But as the years went by and the child did not come, it became increasingly problematic. There was the problem of succession, of course. Who was to inherit Abraham's great wealth? For a time Abraham thought that his fortune would go to his steward, Eliezer of Damascus; but God showed him that Eliezer was not to be the one. For a time Abraham's faith slipped and he began to place his hope in Ishmael, a son he had engendered through a concubine when he was eighty-six years old. He even prayed that God would accept Ishmael as the heir—"If only Ishmael might live under your blessing." But God replied that it was not to be Ishmael. The son in whom the promise was to come would be born of the aged patriarch and Sarah.

Finally, Abraham reached the age of ninety-nine, Sarah being about ninety, and by this time the promise that they could have a child seemed preposterous. Still there was the promise. God *had* promised. Abraham believed God. God changed his name from Abram (which means

"father of many") to Abraham (which means "father of a great multitude"). Within a year after he had done this, Isaac, the son of the promise and an ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ, was born miraculously.

The Bible speaks of Abraham's example at this point when it says, "Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised" (Rom. 4:19-21).

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you and I share faith in a sovereign God. He is in control of all things. He could make your circumstances more pleasing if he thought it best. He can remove barriers. He can eliminate difficulties. If he does not do this, however, then he acts as he does for a purpose; and you should trust him. One of those purposes is undoubtedly to *teach* you to trust him, which you would not do at all if everything that ever came into your life was pleasant and the journey of life was always easy.

Christ's Day

Finally, Abraham placed his hope in the coming of Jesus Christ and rejoiced in that coming. Jesus indicates this when he says, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (v. 56).

I must admit that this is a difficult verse to understand and that there have been many ways of interpreting it. One popular way is to suppose that Jesus merely meant that Abraham was living in paradise at the time and that he rejoiced in Christ's ministry. The difficulty with this view is that the subject of dispute is not Abraham's continued consciousness beyond the grave but rather Christ's preexistence. The next verses say, "Before Abraham was born, I am." Besides, if Christ had wanted to say that Abraham was still living and rejoiced in his birth and ministry, it

would have been far more natural for him to have used present tenses for the verbs ("Abraham is rejoicing to see my day; and he sees it, and is glad"). It seems proper, then, to refer the saying to something that happened to Abraham back in Abraham's day rather than to something contemporary with Christ's ministry.

To place the vision back in Abraham's own time does not in itself solve the problem, however.
For most of the rabbis did this—that is, spoke of a vision of the Messiah that Abraham was supposed to have had—and yet disagreed on how it happened. Some of them began with the initial promise of God to Abraham as recorded in Genesis 12:3. This said, "All peoples of the earth will be blessed through you." They taught that when this was given, Abraham knew that it referred to the coming of the Messiah and so rejoiced in God's promise.

Another view began with the vision of the future history of Israel recorded in Genesis 15:8-12, supposed to have been extended to include the coming of the Messiah. Two further views were based on misinterpretations of Scripture. One interpreted the laughter of Genesis 17:17, when God promised the son to the aged Abraham and Sarah, not as an expression of incredulity but as happiness that the birth of Isaac would lead on to the birth of Israel's deliverer. The other used a literal reading of Genesis 24:1—"Abraham was... well advanced in years," literally, "gone into the days"—to suggest that he saw into the future. These views seem strange to us, as indeed they should. They are hardly convincing, as Leon Morris, who records much of this material in his commentary on John, acknowledges.

Is this all, however? Can no more be said? I believe that more can be said; for the occasion of the vision of Abraham of Christ's day is to be found, I feel, in the story of the near sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah in which Abraham learned in a new way that "the Lord will provide." God came to Abraham and told him to take his son, the heir of the promise, and sacrifice him on a mountain three day's journey away. It must have been a terrible struggle for the old man that evening as he

wrestled with God's command, but sometime during the night he hit upon the solution. He knew that he must obey God, however wrong it seemed, but he also knew that God was a God of his word and that he had committed himself to produce a great nation through Isaac. Isaac had no children at this point. So if God was telling Abraham to kill Isaac, then the God who had done a miracle in Isaac's birth was just going to have to do a miracle in his death. In other words, there was going to have to be a resurrection.

This sounds novel, of course, for not many persons are used to hearing the story taught in this way. Yet it is biblical teaching, for the story indicates that Abraham fully expected to bring Isaac back down the mountain with him after the sacrifice (Gen. 22:5). Moreover, the author of Hebrews states explicitly, "By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.' Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death" (Heb. 11:17-19). Abraham believed that God was going to do a miracle in bringing Isaac back from the dead —precisely the miracle that God the Father did with Jesus Christ the Son, as the special language of those verses from Hebrews indicates.

But even this is not all. For when the trial was over and God had intervened to save Isaac and provided a ram for the sacrifice in place of the boy, Abraham rejoiced and called the name of the place Jehovah Jireh, which means "the Lord will provide" (Gen. 22:14). Earlier, as they had gone up the mountain and Abraham had said this to the servants, it could have meant "the Lord will provide a resurrection of Isaac." Now it could only mean that the same God who provided a ram in substitution for the death of Isaac would one day provide his own Son as the perfect substitute and sacrifice for our salvation.

At this moment, I believe, Abraham saw the coming of Jesus clearly, including the meaning of his death and resurrection, and he rejoiced in that coming.

An Example

Abraham can be an example for you, just as any godly person can be an example. So the question is: Do you do as Abraham did? More specifically: (1) Do you put the calling of God above earthly honors? (2) Do you believe God in spite of circumstances? (3) Do you place your hope in the fact that Jesus came to earth to die for you and rejoice in that coming? No physical relationship to Abraham or to any other godly person will save you, but you will be saved if you do as Abraham did. The God of Abraham should become your God.

Chapter 111.
Is Jesus God?

John 8:57-59

Several years ago I heard a psychiatrist, who was also an existentialist, say, "There are only two great questions in this world: Who am I? and, Where am I going?" I heard the statement and agreed in part that these are great questions. But though I agreed in part, it was only in part. For, although these are great questions, they are not the greatest questions that should be asked and for which we should seek answers. One greater question forms the title of this study: Who is Jesus Christ? Is Jesus Christ God? On the answer to that question hangs our destiny.

A Timely Issue

Who is Jesus Christ? This is the question of questions in John's Gospel. Indeed, as we have seen, the Gospel was written almost entirely to provide an answer to it. The Gospel begins with a full statement of Christ's divinity—"In the beginning was the Word [that is, Jesus], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (1:1). It ends with the statement, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by

believing you may have life in his name" (20:30-31). In between these verses much evidence is given in support of Christ's claim.

What is the issue in this central portion of John's Gospel? Is the issue the distinct nature of his teachings? Is it the sabbath question itself? Is it Christ's good deeds or lack of them? It is none of these things. Rather, the issue is: Who is Jesus Christ? Is Jesus God?

Is Jesus God? If he is not, then let us say so—but only after having considered the evidence. If he is God, then he has a right to our allegiance and loyalty. We must follow him. You cannot honestly be indifferent to Jesus Christ. He did not leave you that option. Thus, you must either follow him as your God and Lord, or you must seek to eradicate his presence from your life, as the religious leaders of his day did. Which will it be? This is the great question of John. It is the great question raised by Christianity. It is a question for you. Will it be Christ, God in the flesh? Or will you be your own "God"? It must be Christ if he is who he declared himself to be.

Christ's Claim

The verse that we are going to study is one in which Jesus claimed to be God explicitly. He was not always so explicit; but he was in this case, and this produced startling consequences. The leaders of the people had been challenging everything he said, and they had just challenged his statement that Abraham had rejoiced to see his day and that he saw it and was glad. They said, "You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham?"

He replied, using his most solemn form of introducing a saying, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am" (vv. 57-58). This so infuriated them that they immediately took up stones to stone him.

To our way of thinking, at least at first sight, it is a bit hard to see why this particular saying would have provoked such a radical response. Stoning was the penalty for blasphemy, for making oneself out to be God. So this is what they understood him to be doing. But how does one get that from these words? And in what sense was he saying it? It is

obvious from the saying itself that Jesus was claiming to have existed before Abraham was born. It also is obvious from the tense of the verb —"Before Abraham was born, *I am*"—that he was claiming an eternal preexistence. But this alone, we might think, would not be sufficient cause for stoning. The real reason for their violent reaction is found in the fact that when Jesus said, "I am," he actually was using the divine name by which God had revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush. When Moses had asked, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exod. 3:13-14). In Hebrew this is the word "Jehovah," and it is this word that Jesus so easily takes to himself in this saying. He claimed to be Jehovah, using the very word "Jehovah." So it was because of this that the Jews, who immediately recognized his claim for what it was, reached out to kill him.

Many Claims

We have said that this was an unusually direct and overpowering claim, and it was. But we must not overlook the fact that it was only one of many claims both direct and indirect by which Jesus declared himself to be God's equal.

Practically everything that Jesus had to say was an indirect claim to divinity. His first preaching is an example. When John the Baptist had come preaching the imminent arrival of God's kingdom, he pointed to One who would himself embody that kingdom. Jesus came, and Jesus' first preaching was the announcement of the kingdom's arrival: "The time has come, ...the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). Later, speaking of himself, he said to the Pharisees, "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). This was a claim that the prophecies of the Old Testament were about him and were fulfilled in him.

All Christ's words about the Old Testament fall into this category also, for the summation of his teaching was, "Do not think that I have come

to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17). When he invited people to follow him —"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt 4:19)—he implied that he was of sufficient stature to be worth following. When he forgave sins, he did it knowing that he was doing what only God can do. Toward the end of his life he promised to send God's Holy Spirit to be with the disciples after his departure, which again implies divinity.

Remarkable among his claims was his unique reference to God as his Father. This was by no means a common form of expression in Judaism, as it is in the English language. No Jew ever spoke of God directly as "my Father." Yet, not only was this the form of address that Jesus used, particularly in his prayers, it was also his only mode of addressing God and it referred to his relationship to the Father exclusively. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). He said, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ...Righteous Father, though the world does not know you; I know you" (17:1, 25).

Eventually Jesus taught his disciples to address God as Father also, as a result of their relationship to himself. But even in this case his relationship to God as Father and their relationship to God as Father were different. Thus, he spoke to Mary Magdalene, saying, "Go to my brothers and tell them I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (20:17). He did not say "to *our* Father" or "to *our* God."

"So close was His connection with God," writes John Stott, "that he equated a man's attitude to himself with his attitude to God. Thus, to know Him was to know God (John 8:19; 14:17); to see Him was to see God (John 12:45; 14:9); to believe in Him was to believe in God (John 12:44; 14:1); to receive Him was to receive God (Mark 9:37); to hate Him was to hate God (John 15:23); and to honor Him was to honor God (John 5:23)."

Jesus' "I am" sayings are worthy of special notice also, for he claimed to be all that men need for a full spiritual life. Only God can rightly make such claims. "I am the bread of life" (6:35). "I am the light of the world"

(8:12; 9:5). "I am the gate" (10:7, 9). "I am the good shepherd" (10:11, 14). "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25). "I am the way and the truth and the life" (14:6). "I am the true vine" (15:1, 5).

One great and final example of Christ's unique conception of himself occurred shortly after the resurrection on the day Jesus appeared among the disciples, Thomas being present. Jesus had appeared to the disciples earlier when Thomas was absent. But when Thomas was told about the appearance, he had replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it" (20:25). Now the Lord appeared to them all once more, this time including Thomas, and he asked Thomas to make the test he had wanted to make: "Put your finger here ... and reach out your hand" (v. 27). Thomas, who was overcome by Christ's presence, immediately fell to the ground and worshiped him saying, "My Lord and my God" (v. 28). Think of it: "Lord and God!" *Adona! Elohim! Jehovah!* And Jesus accepted the designation! He did not deny it! It is no wonder, in light of this testimony, that this is the story John chooses to end all but the postscript of his Gospel.

These, then, are a few of Christ's claims. Thus, whatever we may think of the claims themselves, there can at least be no doubt that Christ made them. Moreover, they remain unchanged. History has not eradicated Christ's claim to be God. Time has not changed it. The Jesus who made the claim then is the same Jesus who is our living contemporary, and the Scriptures tell us that he is the same "yesterday and today and forever." He calls on you to follow him. Will you do it, forsaking all else? If he is not God, then you can safely ignore him. But if he is God, then anything less than a total surrender to him is folly and any other loyalty is idolatrous.

The Rock of Ages

There are three parts to the verses we are considering. The first is the claim of Christ, ("Before Abraham was born, I am"). This has taken most of our space and is important, but the others deserve space also. The second is the reaction of the leaders to that claim ("At this, they

picked up stones to stone him"). The third is the sad result ("Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple guards").

Stoning can mean different things, all the way from simple displeasure to the desire to have someone killed. As such it can stand for any degree of reaction to Christ by men and women who reject him. I remember, years ago when I was in Jordan and was trying to take a picture of a man who was winnowing grain, how the man picked up stones to stone me. He was not trying to kill me. But he did not like me to be trying to take his picture. He was showing displeasure in that way. Sometimes, as in the case of beggars or animals, stoning was used to drive a person or an animal away. At other times, as in this story, it was used as a means of execution. To put it in contemporary terms, then, some merely express displeasure at Jesus while others (expressing the same basic reaction) try to eliminate his presence from their lives.

The strange thing about this is its folly. For Jesus Christ cannot be so easily gotten rid of. If he is God, he is eternal. He is the Ancient of Days. How can one eliminate the Ancient of Days from one's days? He is the Lord of life. How can one exclude the Lord of life from one's life? Imagine trying to dislodge the Rock of Ages with a handful of stones!

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Rock of Ages yet, and you will not get rid of him by throwing things at him. He is inescapable. He is planted in life. Thus, you must either come to terms with him now, or you must do so on the day of judgment. You have one of two choices. You may destroy yourself by pounding yourself against him, just as you can destroy a piece of wood by pounding it upon an anvil. Or you may build upon him. Why not build upon him? The Rock of Ages makes a great foundation. Jesus said that the one who builds upon him will be like a house founded upon a rock upon which the rains descended and the floods came but which fell not. Why not try him? Why not put him to the test?

Jesus Hid Himself

Finally, the verses also indicate the sad result of the action of those who try to get rid of him. We read, "Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple guards" (v. 59). These are sad words, and they are doubly sad because in closing this section of the Gospel they have the added effect of permanence.

What does it mean when we are told that Jesus hid himself? First, it means that although these men could not harm Jesus, nevertheless, they could not benefit from him either. It will be the same for you if you try to keep him out of your life. If you do not allow Jesus to be God in your life, you will not harm him. You cannot harm the invincible and omnipotent God. But you will not benefit from him either. The Lord Jesus Christ came to bring those divine benefits to you. He is the life. He came to give you life, abundant life. He is the light. He wants to shine upon you, to illuminate your darkness and guide you. He is the bread upon whom you may feed and grow. He is the living water who can quench your spiritual thirst. You forfeit these benefits if you refuse him his rightful place in your life.

Second, the verse tells us that there are some from whom Jesus does slip away or "pass by" as the King James Version states it. We live in a day when men and women are won over to egotickling dogmas of universalism, the idea that all will be saved. But there is nothing in the Word of God to justify that conclusion. You say, "But why doesn't God save all men?" I don't know, but he doesn't. And here is a case. Notice that throughout this entire conversation Jesus has not even been trying to convert these religious leaders. He has merely been exposing their sin. Moreover, we are told that Jesus eventually passed by and went his way. There are some people whom God gives up (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). God gives up nations, if they will not live by righteous standards. God gives up churches, when they depart from their first love. God gives up individuals. Woe be to the person whom the Lord Jesus Christ passes by!

Finally, the verse leads us to see that there are some whom God saves anyway. I say "anyway" because I recognize that all of us, even those

who become Christians, deserve to be passed by.

Notice this. In the King James text of John 8, the last words are "passed by." It is a tragic note, a tragic end to the contacts of Christ with these religious leaders. But in the opening verse of the very next chapter, just four and five words later, the words occur again in a story that tells us that "*as Jesus passed by,* he saw a man who was blind from his birth" and saved him. Here was a man who in his blindness could not even see the Lord Jesus. Yet Jesus saw him and gave him both physical and spiritual sight. He could not seek Christ, yet he was found by him. How wonderful! What a great hope for the sinner! "Jesus passed by." Yes. But "as he passed by" he saw this one and saved him. With people such as these he began to build his church. Are you such a one? Why should you not be? Why should you not be one who finds Jesus?

The Gospel of John, Volume 3

Those Who Received Him (John 9-12)

by

James Montgomery Boice

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To him who came to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance

Preface

It has been more than thirty years since I began to study the Gospel of John in a serious way and nearly twenty-five years since my studies of the Gospel began to appear in print. They have been out of print for some time. So it was with much gratitude that I learned of Baker's interest in reissuing them in this revised and attractive version. This version matches the format of the other sets that Baker has published: *Genesis* (3 volumes), *Psalms* (3 volumes) and *Romans* (4 volumes). It also matches the single volume studies of *Acts* and *Ephesians.*

This is the third volume of a five part work. The first volume dealt with Jesus' coming into the world and the reactions of a few representative persons to him. It covered chapters 1-4. The second volume dealt with the origins of the hostility to Jesus that began to develop among the religious authorities early in his ministry. It covered chapters 5-8. This volume covers chapters 912 in which Jesus turns to those whom the Father has given him out of the world and begins to teach them.

Volumes 4 and 5 complete the series. Volume 4 (chapters 13-17) is concerned with Jesus' final private teaching of his disciples, usually called the final discourses, and with his powerful highpriestly prayer recorded in chapter 17. Volume 5 deals with the culmination of Christ's earthly ministry, centering in his betrayal by Judas, his arrest, his trial

by the Jewish and Roman authorities, his death, and his resurrection (chapters 18-21).

As with previous volumes, I have occasionally deviated from a strict verse-by-verse exposition to deal with a particularly important theme in greater depth than would be possible by the verseby-verse method. The clearest example is the study of John 11:35, the shortest verse in the Bible ("Jesus wept"), to which I have devoted four studies. I have also devoted six studies each to the themes of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-21) and suffering and death (John 11:4-26). In earlier volumes extensive study was given to the themes of baptism, witnessing, the Sabbath, and the authority of the Scriptures. Echoes of three of those subjects—witnessing, the Sabbath, and the Scriptures—occur at appropriate places in volume 3.

Some of this material has already appeared in print, although with limited circulation. The most widely circulated piece was the message on "How to Save Your Own Life" (John 12:24-26), which was printed in the *Christian Observer,* a paper which has since gone out of business. Material from chapter 20 ("Word of the Living God," John 10:35) appeared long ago in a small pamphlet by the same title. Several of the messages on suffering were published in a special premium booklet offered to listeners to the *Bible Study Hour* during the spring of 1976. The *Bible Study Hours* regular publication, originally called *Bible Studies Magazine* (now *God's Word Today),* circulated each of these studies as they were aired.

It is impossible adequately to express a debt to all, both living and dead, who have been a help to me in my preparation of these studies. The footnotes will reflect my strong debt to Charles Spurgeon, Arthur Pink, Donald Barnhouse, and Alexander Maclaren, but dozens of other commentators were regularly consulted. I still believe that Leon Morris's volume, *The Gospel According to John*, is the best of all recent commentaries. As with most of my books, Miss Caecilie Foelster, my secretary, joined me in careful editing of the manuscript and in seeing it through the stages of its original production. I owe a debt as well to the

Session and congregation of Tenth Presbyterian Church who encourage me to spend much of my time in such serious Bible study and writing.

To God be all glory, for this and all other spiritual endeavors by his elect people. Amen and amen.

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Chapter 112.
Christ and a Man Born Blind

John 9:1

There are verses in the opening chapter of John's Gospel that provide an outline for the first twelve chapters of the book and are, therefore, important at this point as our study of the Gospel enters upon a new section. These verses speak of the coming of the Light into the world and say of that Light, "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (1:11-12). The coming of the Light aptly describes the content of the first four chapters of John's Gospel. That "he came to that which was his own" describes the content of the next four chapters. The chapters we are about to study, chapters 9 through 12, deal with "all who received him," for in these chapters we see that the emphasis is on Jesus calling out a people of his own in the midst of, and in spite of, growing hostility from the authorities of Judaism. This new section differs from the one before it in that in the old section we see Christ being rejected by his own people, while in this section Christ, being rejected by his people, begins to call out a new people. This is first exemplified by the story of the call of Jesus to the man who had been born blind.

"I Am the Light"

The contrast between these two sections—section two (composed of chapters 5 through 8) and section three (chapters 9 through 12)—may be pointed up in another way also. In chapters 8 and 9 there is an "I am" saying of Jesus that is repeated twice, once in each chapter. The saying is the same—"I am the light of the world"—but the contexts are different; this is illustrative of the difference between the two sections.

In John 8 Jesus' saying occurs in the twelfth verse, just after he had dealt with the accusers of the woman who had been taken in adultery. It refers to the effect of his testimony upon these men. They had come to Jesus after having just trapped the poor woman. They said, "In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" (v. 5). They were not interested in the law. They were only figuring that if Jesus consented to the requirement of the law and had the woman stoned, then they could ridicule him as the One who invited sinners to come to him but then dealt harshly with them. On the other hand, they reasoned, if he overlooked the law and gave a judgment of mercy, then they could say, "What kind of a prophet is this who advises laying aside the law of Moses? "Jesus dealt with these men by suggesting that the one who was sinless cast the first stone. At this point, as the light of his righteousness shone upon them, the accusers began to slip away one by one, beginning with the eldest. At last Jesus, being left alone in the midst of the crowd with the woman, uttered his saying.

What did he mean when on this occasion he said, "I am the light of the world"? To have an answer we need only think of the effect of light on something that has been shielded from light a long time. Imagine a board out in a field. Kick it over and immediately all the bugs and other squirmy things begin to slither away into dark areas. This is what happened when Jesus spoke to these leaders. Jesus turned over a board, and away went those Pharisees! They could not stand before the light, and they hated Jesus for it. It is not surprising, therefore, that the chapter ends with an attempt by these men to stone Jesus.

On the other hand, light also has another and entirely different effect upon some things that are exposed to it. Take the ground that was covered over by the board. When the board is first turned over the bugs run for cover. But leave the board off that patch of ground for awhile, and soon the same sun that made the bugs run for cover will begin to make the seeds in the ground grow. In a short time that patch of earth will be covered with grass or flowers, just like the growth in the field that surrounds it. This latter effect gives us the meaning of Christ's second "I am the light of the world," in John 9. In chapter 8 the Light made the creatures of darkness run. In chapter 9 the Light begins to call forth life and produce growth in those within whom God has planted the seed of saving faith. In this sense John 9 is the story of the sovereign and electing grace of God in salvation.

Arthur W. Pink, a valuable commentator on this Gospel, captures the differences between chapters 8 and 9 (hence also between sections two and three) in this manner: "In John 8 we behold Christ as 'the light' exposing the darkness, but in John 9 He communicates sight. In John 8 the Light is despised and rejected, in John 9 He is received and worshipped. In John 8 the Jews are seen stooping down—to pick up stones; in John 9 Christ is seen stooping down—to make anointing clay. In John 8 Christ hides Himself from the Jews; in John 9 He reveals Himself to the blind beggar. In John 8 we have a company in whom the Word has no place (v. 37); in John 9 is one who responds promptly to the Word (v. 7). In John 8 Christ, inside the Temple, is called a demoniac (v. 48); in John 9, outside the Temple, He is owned as Lord (v. 36). The central truth of John 8 is the Light testing human responsibility; in John 9 the central truth is God acting in sovereign grace *after* human responsibility has failed."

No Frustration

If this is the true contrast between these two sections, as there is every reason to believe, then the first and great lesson to be learned from chapter 9 is that *man cannot frustrate God.* Man's hatred cannot frustrate God. Man's sin cannot frustrate God. Rather, God

accomplishes his purposes sovereignly, saving by grace those whom he chooses to call to himself.

The fact that man's hatred cannot frustrate God is seen clearly from the story and in particular from the fact that Jesus was not disturbed by the action of the religious leaders in their attempt to stone him. The stoning attempt was a serious incident. It would have created a great turmoil in the temple precincts. Nevertheless, a moment later, after Jesus had removed himself probably little more than a good stone's throw away, we find him stopping to fix his eyes on the blind beggar who had been sitting near the temple gate. Most of us in a similar situation would scarcely have had eyes for the beggar. We would be looking over our shoulder to see if we were being pursued, and we would be trying to put an even greater distance between ourselves and our enemies. Not Jesus! No doubt he felt the contradiction of sinners against himself. He even wept over Jerusalem at one point in his ministry. But this did not disturb him where his work was concerned. So we find him calm and self-possessed, acting with a profound disregard of his enemies and their hatred.

Jesus was not deterred from his work either, which we might well have been had we been in his place. He was the light of the world. He had just been rejected. Would it not have been reasonable for him to have returned at once to heaven, thereby turning his back on our sinful world? Would it not have been reasonable for him to have abandoned our race? Nothing is more reasonable from a human point of view. But Jesus had God's point of view, and it was God who was acting. Therefore, instead of accepting the no of sinful men, Christ simply persevered in his task and began to elect some to salvation. The Bible says, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (Rom. 9:15).

This verse tells us about the God whom we serve, and we should know that nothing frustrates him. What do you think God is doing in heaven anyway? To hear some people talk you would think he is cowering behind a cloud somewhere, afraid of every new evil that man's rebellion might bring. At the height of the Watergate scandal, with its long series

of damaging revelations, a cartoon appeared in which a man and a woman were cowering behind a chair that, in its turn, was facing a television set. They were holding onto each other and were shaking with fear as the newscaster said, "And now for the latest stunning development...." We must not think that God is like that. Some people picture God as surprised when Adam sinned. God had created a perfect world. Adam spoiled it. So God is imagined to have said to himself, "Oh, my, the man and the woman sinned. They fell. Whatever will I do now?" Eventually God decides that he will send Jesus, but when Jesus is rejected he is puzzled again. God is not like that. That is not our God. Our God sees the end from the beginning and is not frustrated. Therefore, nothing defeats or will ever defeat his purposes.

Jesus said, "I will build my church." This is his purpose in this age, and he is building it. Therefore, all who are given to Jesus Christ by the Father will come to him.

We may make an important conclusion at this point, and the conclusion is this: If God's purposes cannot be frustrated—and they cannot be—then if we make God's purposes our purposes, we will not be frustrated either. Do you find life frustrating? Does it get you down? Do you seem to be getting nowhere? If so, make God's purposes your own, and you will find that frustration will disappear and life will receive new meaning. If you are working for God, then your work will bear fruit and Jesus Christ will be glorified.

The State of the Lost

We have seen that the hatred of man cannot frustrate God. We also need to see that the state of the lost cannot frustrate God either. Once again, this is made clear by our story.

Think for a moment of this poor blind man, and think of all he symbolizes. He symbolizes the state of the lost apart from the creative and transforming power of the Lord Jesus. On the one hand, we have the rulers of the people, the Pharisees, who can see physically but who are spiritually blind. On the other hand, there is the blind man. He

cannot see physically, but Christ makes him see both physically and spiritually. By the end of the story we find him worshiping Jesus as the Son of God and the Lord.

What is the state of this man? For one thing, he cannot see, and this means that he cannot see Jesus. This is the state of the lost today. Jesus is preached, but they cannot see him. The gospel is explained, but they cannot understand it. Indeed, the Bible says that "the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). If there is to be spiritual sight, Jesus must first open blind eyes.

Second, because the man who had been born blind was unable to see, it was also true that he could not seek Jesus. Indeed, how can a blind man seek anything? In spiritual terms this means that a man is unable to seek God, which truth God tells us. For he flatly declares that "there is no one who... seeks God" (Rom. 3:11).

Third, if the blind man was unable to seek Jesus, it is also true that he was unable to find him. What is more, since he was a beggar, it is also obvious that he was unable to hire someone else to seek Christ and find him either. What a condition—unable to see, seek, or find Jesus, and unable to procure help in finding him. It is a sad state, but it is doubly sad in that it describes the condition of all men spiritually.

Have you ever noticed that all the miracles of healing in John's Gospel illustrate the truths of this story? Each one shows man to be helpless in his sin, but each also shows the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ triumphant. The first miracle is the healing of the impotent man, recorded in John 5. What is the point of this story? Why did John include it? Obviously, John included this healing to make the point that the man was unable to make the first move toward Jesus. Nor can we. If we are to be saved, Jesus must make the first move toward us and even give strength to respond to him. The story of the man born blind is saying the same thing in other ways, making the point that sinful men cannot see God's truth. But again Jesus makes the first step by restoring

sight. Finally, a few chapters further on, we come upon the case of Lazarus, who had been dead four days before Christ came to him. He was utterly lost. Lazarus could not even call out to Jesus to say, "Master, help me." He was dead. But Jesus called him—"Lazarus, come forth"—and the call of the Lord of life gave life to Lazarus.

This is the gospel. It is the truth of God concerning the hopeless state of the lost and of the power of God to save such as he wills to save. God's purposes are not frustrated by either the hatred of men or the sin of the lost.

Sinner, Take Heart

Let me apply these truths in this way. First, if you are a Christian and have been witnessing to another person concerning Christ, you can be encouraged by knowing that God will never be frustrated by human sin. There may be much in the situation to frustrate you. You may seem to get nowhere. In fact, in a given witnessing situation there may be more to frustrate you than in any other situation in life. Still, God is not frustrated, and you should not be either. Instead, you should be encouraged by knowing that if God is working, nothing will hinder that working. If the light of God is shining, his light will make seeds grow. So, be bold! Witness boldly, and expect God to bring forth his harvest!

Second, if you are one who has not yet believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, you too can take heart by seeing what he did in the life of the man who had been born blind. Think of what Jesus Christ did for him. For one thing, the story tells us that he saw him, that is, that he took notice of him. The blind man could not see Jesus, but Jesus saw the blind man; and that was the important thing after all. Moreover, when he saw him he saw him as a man who needed his help. Jesus alone saw him in this way. The disciples looked at the man and saw him as a sinner.

"Who sinned," they asked, "this man or his parents?" The passersby looked at him as a beggar. "Isn't he the man who sat and begged?" The Pharisees saw him as a tool, for they wanted to maneuver him to trap

Jesus. But Jesus—well, Jesus saw him as a man who needed help, and he saved him.

Moreover, Jesus took him in when all others had cast him out. His family had cast him out. His neighbors had no use for him. Even his pastors rejected him. Eventually, because of the excommunication, the nation had no room for him either. No family, neighbors, pastors, nation! Who was left? Only Jesus! It was Jesus who sought him out and received him when no one else would receive him or even rejoice in his healing.

Are you one whom this world has cast out? Do you feel alone and rejected? Come to Jesus! Jesus is the One who is altogether lovely. Let Jesus be yours. Say, "O Lord Jesus, I want you to be my Savior."

Chapter 113.
The Problem of Pain

John 9:2-3

If God were good, he would wish to make his creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty he would be able to do what he wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power, or both." This, as C. S. Lewis states in his small book, *The Problem of Pain,* is the problem of human suffering in its simplest form. And it must be admitted that if the Bible does not throw additional light upon this problem—if it does not reveal more about the nature and purposes of God than this statement of the problem leads us to see—then the problem is insoluable and life lacks meaning.

All Suffer

At some time or other every human being must experience suffering. A person causes pain by being born. Many live by inflicting pain. Most suffer pain. Eventually all experience death. It is true that believers who

are alive at the time of Christ's return to this earth will be transformed in a moment and will not die. But with this exception, it is the lot of all to suffer and die. Eliphaz spoke truthfully to Job when he told the suffering patriarch, "For hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble sprout from the ground. Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward" (Job 5:6-7).

There is a distinction to be made even at this point, however. For while it is true that all suffer, Christians as well as non-Christians, it is nevertheless not true that all suffering is alike. Seen from the outside, a Christian suffering from an incurable disease and a non-Christian suffering from the same disease may be supposed to be undergoing the same experience. But, according to the plain teachings of the Word of God, the two are not equal. From God's point of view the nonChristian is suffering without purpose. Or, which may sometimes be the case, he is suffering at the whim of Satan, who is merely doing as he pleases with a member of his own kingdom. In the case of the Christian, an all-wise heavenly Father is permitting suffering in a carefully controlled situation in order that he might accomplish a desirable purpose. The Book of Job alone teaches us about the latter.

But if suffering—that endured by a Christian—has purpose, surely we are not out of line in asking what that purpose is. If we are to learn from it, we must ask what it is we are to learn; if we are to profit, we must ask how. The answers to these questions are suggested to us by some of Christ's words uttered on the occasion of his healing of the blind man, recorded in John 9.

False Assumptions

We are told by the author that as Jesus passed by the gate of the temple, having placed himself out of reach of those leaders of the nation who were attempting to kill him, "he saw a man blind from birth." This man had begged at the temple gate for many years, and he was apparently known to the disciples. They would have walked on. But when Jesus stopped to look at this man, they stopped too and began to ask him a

philosophical question: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

The question they asked was the age-old question of the problem of pain, the question we have been asking. But in their mouths it took a form that immediately reveals two basic (and erroneous) assumptions. In the first place, the question revealed the pagan assumption that suffering in this life often is retribution for sin committed in some previous life, conceived in the categories of a system of reincarnation. Such views were common in the first century, even in Judaism. Many religions and cults in our own day still hold to them. The Scriptures do not support this, however. Instead they teach that the issues of eternity are settled for each individual during his own, single lifetime.

The second erroneous assumption made by the disciples was that the suffering of the blind man had been caused by the sin of his parents. This, of course, was possible. Sins of parents can be visited upon children. Blindness can result from venereal disease, for instance.

In this case, however, Jesus replied that the man had been born blind, neither because of his own sin nor for the sin of his parents, but rather that the glory of God might be revealed in him. He said, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (v. 3). This means—let us state it frankly—that God had allowed the man to be born blind so that at this particular moment in his earthly life Jesus might come upon him and cure him and that, as a result, God might receive glory. Having said that, Jesus then performed a miracle and restored the man's sight.

Here is our first great lesson from the story. *There are no pat answers to the question of human suffering.* There are answers, of course—we are going to see some of them—but there are no pat answers. Consequently, we cannot say, as some do, that it is the right of every believer to be healthy. This is nonsense. Or that suffering is always the direct result of personal sin. In some cases, suffering is corrective. It is given in order to get us back on the path that God has chosen for us. In other cases, it

is constructive. It is given to build character. In still other cases, as here, it is given solely that God might receive glory.

We must not make the mistake of some people who imagine that if someone suffers some great natural catastrophe, it is because God has struck him or her down for some sin. These people imagine God to be a stern, implacable judge, who spends his time watching over people in order to catch them sinning. "I am watching you," God says, "and if you do something you are not supposed to do—whoops!—you did it! So 'BANG'—that's what happens to you." This is not true. What is more, it is a scandal on the name of God. One commentator puts it this way: "God is not up in heaven trying to hit people. God is love. Anyone could testify to the fact that many times he has sinned and has not reaped the fruits of that sin. God has been gracious in a wonderful way. How tender and patient He is with us."

Do not ever imagine that this is God's way. For if you do, you immediately make yourself into a nasty little judge, trying to find out what another Christian has done instead of recognizing that in God's providence all things come to God's people, and that in many cases God simply sends suffering that he might be glorified. In these cases suffering is a great honor, and we should be humbled before it.

Three Errors

Calvin, the great reformer, has some wonderfully wise words for all of us who tend to judge others. First, we should note, he acknowledges that in one form or another suffering does come from sin. If there had never been sin, there would be no suffering. But when we go on from that statement to begin to link up particular suffering in some person with some particular sin, we generally err in one or all of three ways.

"Since everyone is a bitter censor of others," Calvin writes, "few apply the same severity to themselves as they should do. If things go badly with my brother, I at once acknowledge the judgment of God. But if God chastises me with a heavier stroke, I overlook my sins. In considering punishments, every man should begin with himself and

spare none less than himself. And so, if we want to be fair judges in this matter, let us learn to be perspicacious in our own evils rather than in those of others.

"The second error lies in immoderate severity. No sooner is a man touched by the hand of God than we interpret it as deadly hatred, and make crimes out of faults, and almost despair of his salvation. On the other hand, we extenuate our sins, and are hardly conscious of faults when we have committed most serious crimes.

"Thirdly, we are wrong to put under condemnation all without any exception whom God exercises with the cross. What we have said just now is undoubtedly true, that all our distresses arise from sin. But God afflicts His people for various reasons. Just as there are some whose crimes He does not avenge in this world, but whose punishment He delays to the future life, to try them the harder, so He often treats His faithful more severely; not because they have sinned more, but that He may mortify the sins of the flesh for the future. Sometimes, too, He is not concerned with their sins, but only testing their obedience or training them to patience. As we see that holy man Job unfortunate beyond all others, and yet he is not beset on account of his sins; but God's purpose was quite different—that his godliness might be the more fully testified in adversity. They are false interpreters, therefore, who attribute all afflictions without distinction to sins; as if the measure of punishments were equal, or as if God regarded nothing else in punishing men than what every man deserves."

God's Purpose in Suffering

There are, then, many false views of suffering, and they must be avoided. But, when that is said, we still want to know the correct views. We still want to know why Christians especially suffer. And, to make it very personal, we want to know why God permits us to suffer in any specific instance. Here only the Word of God gives guidance.

To begin with, we are told that some sufferings are corrective, that is, that God sends some pain in order to get us back on the path he has set

before us. Spankings are an illustration here. If a child has done wrong, he needs a spanking; and if he has the right kind of father and mother, he receives one. Why? Because the father and mother delight to inflict pain? Because they do not love the child and therefore do not care about him? Not at all! In fact, the opposite is the case. If they do not love him, they do not spank him; if they do love him, chastisement follows when he has done wrong. Spankings are a necessary part of the child's training, for he must learn that an individual is not free to do whatever he wishes to do, irrespective of the wishes and sometimes the commands of others. Moreover, he must learn through obeying the parent to obey God. In the same way, some suffering is given to teach Christians that sin is wrong and to teach them obedience. It is along this line that the well-known verses from Hebrews 12 were written. "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ...No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (vv. 5-7, 11).

The first thing we should do when we are confronted with suffering is to ask God whether or not it is intended for our correction. If it is, then we need to confess our sin or waywardness and return once more to the path set before us.

Constructive Suffering

Second, God sends the believer some sufferings that are constructive. It is by means of these sufferings that God is able to whittle away that which is unpleasing in our lives and form the character of the Lord Jesus Christ within us.

In one of his books, Donald Grey Barnhouse illustrates this process by the task of producing a statue. He writes, "The great artist Benvenuto Cellini tells us in his autobiography how he felt as he stood before a block of marble that had been brought to Florence for him to form into

a great statue. Several chapters are devoted to the design and creation of the work of art which still stands in his native city as his greatest monument. Between the rough-hewn block of marble and the finished statue were all the love and care of the artist, and the infinite patience of releasing from stone the vision of beauty which he saw before he began to work. Thus the Heavenly Father is at work in the life of everyone whom he has foreknown as believing in the Savior. There is a difference between ourselves and a block of marble, however, in that we have feelings and can shrink from the strokes with which the divine Sculptor would cut away the marble so that the likeness of Christ may emerge in our lives."

In David's great psalm about the importance of knowing the Bible, the great king tells us that before he was afflicted he went astray, but that after his affliction he obeyed the word of God (Ps. 119:67). Affliction was a factor in his growth. So it is in the lives of many of God's children.

Glory to God

Finally, as in the case of the man who had been born blind, some suffering is merely that the grace of God might be revealed in the life of the Christian. Job was such a person. Lazarus was another. Beyond any doubt, both of these men were sinners and both suffered corrective and constructive sufferings at many different times in their lives. Nevertheless, in the cases of their suffering that are recorded for us in the pages of God's Word (one in the Book of Job and one in John 11), neither constructive nor corrective sufferings are in view but rather that kind of suffering that brings glory to God. In Job's case glory was given in the demonstration, observed by Satan and all the angels, that Job did not love the Lord for what he could get out of him but because the Lord was worthy to be loved and obeyed. This was true regardless of what happened to Job personally. Ultimately Job was vindicated and received his reward.

Would God Almighty permit a man to be stripped of his family and all his possessions, to be struck with such illness that he would find

himself sitting in ashes bemoaning that he had ever been born, just so that God himself might be vindicated? Would God permit a man to be struck with total blindness throughout the better part of his life so that in God's own time he might become the object of a miracle performed by the Lord Jesus Christ? Would God permit a child of his to die, bringing suffering not only upon himself but also upon his sisters who mourned for him, just so God could be glorified? In the light of the Word of God we answer not only that God would do such things but that he has done them and, indeed, continues to do them in order that he might bring victory for himself and all believers in that great and invisible war between the powers of good and of evil. Moreover, those who know God well know this and (in part) understand it. They know that God is both perfect and loving and that he does all things well.

When suffering comes we must therefore check out these three possibilities. One, is it corrective, sent by God to return us to the proper path? Two, is it constructive? If so, we should ask him to use it in making us more like Jesus Christ. And three, is it for his glory? If the latter is the case, we must ask God to keep us faithful so that Satan and his hosts may be discomfited and others may learn that we at least are delighted to have God do with us whatsoever he pleases.

Chapter 114.

Jesus, the Worker

John 9:4

The subject of the following study is work, particularly Christian work. And the example for that work is none other than that great worker, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the words we are studying he speaks about his work and gives direction to our own. The text is the fourth verse of John 9: "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work."

To understand the force of this text we must take it in the context of the chapter, for it follows upon a speculative question that had been asked

of Jesus by the disciples. The group had come upon a man who had been blind from birth, and the disciples had asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" In other words, the disciples (who had not yet learned to look on men as Christ looked on them, as people to be loved) saw the man as a philosophical problem, and they were at once ready to debate it. Suffering is related to sin, they reasoned. The man is suffering; therefore sin is involved. So, whose sin is it? This was the line of their thinking.

To Jesus, however, the man was above all a man and, more than that, one on whom he had compassion. So instead of entering deeply into their question—he could have written a book about it—he answered them briefly, while at the same time setting about to heal the man born blind. It is in this connection that he spoke of his work, stressing that he must be about it. He added that the night was coming when no man could work.

We are to learn from this, as Spurgeon said, that "the Savior has a greater respect for work than he has for speculation." Questions are good. There are answers to such questions. Jesus gives them. But there is an eternity to ask and answer questions. What counts now is to work, for the working time is limited and the workers are few. God had sent Jesus to work. He was determined to do that work. If you are a Christian, God has also given you work to do. The conclusion is that you should set about doing that work with the same determination.

A Need to Work

The verse itself is most instructive, however, and the first thought it brings before our minds is the necessity of working. This is indicated by the first phrase, in which Jesus said, "We *must* do the work."

The necessity of working is something that is found throughout Christ's ministry, and it is related to the *will of God* for him. Indeed, it is almost a *leit motiv* of Christ's teaching. The earliest recorded utterance of Jesus makes this point. His parents had taken him to Jerusalem for the Passover when he was twelve years old, and when they left to return to

Nazareth Jesus stayed behind in the temple. Joseph and Mary thought he was with the others in their company. When they discovered he was missing, they went back to Jerusalem and, after much searching, found him. He was discussing doctrine with the leaders of the people. "Son, why have you treated us like this?" asked his mother.

Jesus replied, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I *had to* be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49).

Years later Jesus began his public ministry and, early in that ministry, came to Capernaum. In Capernaum he cast out demons and healed Peter's mother-in-law who was sick with a fever. As a result of these miracles, many in Capernaum and the area around it urged him to remain with them. But Jesus answered, "I *must* preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent" (Luke 4:43). In other words, he felt the divine necessity to work in his preaching.

On another occasion a short man named Zacchaeus climbed a tree in order to see Jesus as the crowd in which Jesus was walking passed by. Jesus knew the need of this man's heart and soul. So he stopped at the tree, looked up, and said to the man; "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I *must* stay at your house today" (Luke 19:5).

Jesus referred to the lifting up of the brass serpent in the wilderness in speaking to Nicodemus, saying, "Even so *must* the Son of man be lifted up"

(John 3:14). He said, "The Son of Man *must* suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day raised to life" (Luke 9:22). Later he told his disciples, "Other sheep I have, that are not of this fold; them also I *must* bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:16). From the beginning of his ministry to the end, Jesus felt a necessity of obedience to the will of God to be resting upon him.

There is another reason why Jesus felt compelled to work. The first was obedience to the will of God. The second, which is no less important, is the *need of men.* In John 8 we read about Jesus being driven out of the temple area. We would feel it to be all right if we found Jesus thinking primarily about his own needs and problems. But he is not. For as soon as he is outside the temple area, by the very gate of the temple, he spots a blind beggar and is immediately taken up with his need and problems. The heart of the Lord Jesus Christ went out to him. Moreover, it was always this way with Jesus. Wherever he looked there were sheep to be gathered and souls to be won. So he worked; the need of men compelled him to it.

It is no different today. Today the need is also great. Men and women are perishing in our time without the gospel and without Christ. They fill our cities and our countryside. There are the poor, the lonely, the outcasts of our society. The need is there. Who will reach them? Will you? Do you feel that you must work? Jesus felt it and, as a result, was a blessing to all who knew him. What have we done to be a blessing to those who are in need?

A third source of the necessity that Jesus felt to work was undoubtedly the *love for others* that filled him. Jesus loved others; hence, he had to go out of his way to work for them.

Do we love others? Or do we see them only as problems, as the disciples saw the man who had been born blind? Do we love others enough to help them? Or do we merely give lectures? There is an illustration of what ought to be done in Christ's story of the loving father and the prodigal son. The son had taken his share of the father's inheritance and had gone off to another country where he had wasted it on low living. When it was gone he returned home and found his father waiting. He said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." The father said—well, what did the father say? Or, to make it more personal, what might we have said had we been the father? Is it not true that we would have been ready first of all to give lectures and to ask questions? "Where have you been?" we might have asked.

"What have you been doing? What happened to your good clothes? And where is your money?
Don't you know that you have wasted it all, and that it was half of my estate? Waste is not good. You have not played the role of a good steward, even less that of a faithful and loving son. What are we to do with you? What could you possibly expect to receive from me now?" These are the questions and comments we might have made, but this was not the course taken by the father. Instead, he threw his arms about the neck of his son and kissed him—he knew it all anyway, you see—and said, "Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:22-24).

The story is given to show the love of God the Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ for sinners, and it should be our pattern. Is the man or woman who is steeped in sin repulsive to you? His sin is no less repulsive to the Lord Jesus. Jesus loves him anyway, even to the point of having died in his place. This love should move us. The love of the Lord Jesus Christ should constrain us. It should constrain us to work for the other person's salvation.

Specialized Work

There is a second lesson that comes from Christ's words about work. It is the specialized nature of the work, which Jesus indicates by the next phrase in the sentence. "I must do *the work of him who sent me."* It was the work of God (and only that) that Jesus felt compelled to do, while it was yet day.

There are many people who can take the first part of this verse and say with great honesty and enthusiasm, "I must work." But there are few who can say, "I must do the work of him who sent me." Take as an example a man who is determined to get ahead in business. He rises early in order to get to the office before most of the other employees. He puts in a long day, skipping coffee breaks, even having his lunch sent in to him. After the others leave, he stays; it is late when he finally

starts home. At night he is thinking about his business and planning for the next day. What time and what skill he puts into getting ahead in his work! How strong is his desire! It is a proper desire, of course. If a man wants to get on in the world, he must work. Hard work is good for a person. We would never want to encourage any active man to be idle. And yet—this is the point—Jesus came into the world not to get ahead in business or to get rich, but rather to do the work of him who sent him. It was upon this that he set his desire and bent every activity.

Do we apply the same discipline and enthusiasm that we have in other areas of our lives to the work of God?

Moreover, notice that Jesus was not selective in the works he felt compelled to accomplish. He did not pick and choose. Rather, he said, "We must do the *work* of him who sent me." That is, "We must do all of them." There were works of preaching and of praying, of rebuking and of suffering, finally, even of dying. But whatever they were and whether they were either personally appealing or unappealing—we remember that in the Garden of Gethsemane he sweat as it were great drops of blood as his soul shrank in horror from the spiritual suffering of the cross—Jesus determined to do all of them. Have we? Or have we pulled back from that which is distasteful? There is no doubt that much Christian work remains undone simply because of this: that all Christians have not yet learned that each believer is personally to do the works—all the works—of him who sent him.

Shortness of Time

Third, Christ's words about work also teach us about a limitation of the time allotted to work and, therefore, also about time's shortness. Jesus indicated this by saying, "*As long as it is day,* we must do the work of him who sent me."

These words are striking in the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ, much more so than if they had been spoken by any mere man or woman. Christ is the timeless God. He lived in eternity past and will be living throughout eternity future. If anyone could have postponed work, surely

it was the Lord Jesus. Yet we see him concerned for the moment and aware that the moment was passing. If that is true for Jesus, how much more true is it for us who are entirely creatures of time and for whom time is quickly passing!

Time is passing for ourselves, first of all. We are here today, studying our Bibles, listening to a radio broadcast. But there is not an ounce of assurance that we will be here tomorrow. Death may come. At the very least sickness may be upon us, and the opportunities for service that we have today may be over. Or, again, even if we remain in good health, the time of opportunity may pass for the one to whom we should be bringing the gospel or whom we should be serving.

Are you a preacher? If so, you will not preach to that same congregation for long. Some will die this year, more the next. What are you waiting for? What hinders you from preaching the full counsels of God with all the depth, maturity, and enthusiasm of which you are capable? Richard Baxter once said, "I preach as though I ne'er might preach again, and as a dying man to dying men." That should be your standard.

Are you a Sunday school teacher? If you are, the principle applies to you also. You will not have your children long. You have them for a little less than sixty minutes a week and for less than a year. What will you teach them in that time? What will they learn? For some it may be the only time in their lives in which they will have opportunity to hear about God's love for them in Christ and of his great plans for them. For some it may be the only time in which they will have an opportunity to memorize Scripture.

Are you a mother or a father? Then these truths are for you also. Now is the time to train your children. You must begin while they are young. You will not have them for more than twenty years, and they will be malleable to your teaching for even less than that. You must lead them to faith in the Savior. You must teach them the ways of God with men and help them to develop Christian character. God will not hold you guiltless if you fail to do this; for you are responsible for them, and the

time is passing. In this as in other areas "night is coming, when no one can work."

The Night, the Night

Finally, and as a result of this last phase, we must consider the end of things historically. True, there is an end of life for each of us, for those to whom we witness and for ourselves. But it is also true that the night comes in history, so that opportunities for work that a particular age offers can be ended. Today there are great opportunities. How long will they last? Who knows but that a new dark age may soon be upon us?

In an address given on the occasion of his installation as Visiting Professor of Theology at Eastern Baptist Seminary in Philadelphia, Dr. Carl F. H. Henry spoke of the frightening rise of a new barbarianism in our age. "The barbarians are coming," said Henry, as he likened today's onrush of paganism to the barbarian conquest of Christian Rome. They are coming in science, through the misuse of new discoveries. They are coming in communications, as men discover ways to manipulate public opinion for bad ends. They are coming in the religious realm, as institutional Christianity increasingly gives way to the occult, the cults, and Satanism. "Obscure the vitalities of revealed religion," said Henry, "detour churchgoers from piety and saintliness, and in the so-called enlightened nations not only will the multitudes soon relapse to a retrograde morality, but churchgoers will live in Corinthian immorality, churchmen will encourage situational ethics, and the line between the Christian and the worldling will scarce be found."

The night is coming. Jesus said it is coming, and we can sense that it is so. But this is not all we can say. The night is coming? Yes! But Jesus is also coming. And so, the barbarians do not have the future to themselves. The Lord is returning to judge the barbarism and receive his own. One day we must stand before him. That is our hope. We rejoice! At the same time we recognize that it is also a day of reckoning. Have we worked for Jesus? Have we invested those talents

that he has given us? God grant that we may and that one day we may hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Chapter 115.
The Sixth Miracle

John 9:5-12

The miracles recorded in John's Gospel have been chosen with a view to the spiritual lessons they can teach. There are only seven of them—the changing of the water into wine, the healing of the nobleman's son, the curing of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, the feeding of the five thousand, Christ's walking on the water, the restoring of sight to the man who had been born blind, and the raising of Lazarus. Many more could have been included. But these were chosen— John says so explicitly—in order that those who read about them might be led to faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah and the Son of God (20:31).

In John's mind, then, these miracles are particularly significant. They are significant precisely because they teach spiritual truths.

This has been becoming more and more obvious as our study of the miracles has proceeded. The first miracle pictured Jesus at a wedding, making wine. Clearly this reveals him as One who enters into human joys and who actually gives joy; but it is not a terribly profound lesson. Other people could be said to do that. In later miracles, however, we see him as the One who is able to restore lost health, provide for all human needs, and even save people when people do not desire saving. In these later miracles we learn of our terribly lost condition, of God's unmerited election of sinners to salvation, and of the irresistible nature of Christ's grace.

In the sixth miracle—the miracle of the restoring of sight to the man who had been born blind— this is no less true. Hence, we are able to turn to the story, not only for the story itself (it is a very good one) but

also for what it has to teach about the nature of our salvation. To do this we look first at the blind man; second, at Jesus; third, at the means employed by Jesus in the miracle; and fourth, at his command. The conclusion is that we are to be saved from our spiritual blindness in the same manner.

The Blind Man

We begin, then, with the blind man. Indeed, it is a pitiable place to begin. There is not much we can say in favor of him at the moment in which Jesus found him. Later he becomes quite tenacious in hanging onto what he knows about Jesus. This is praiseworthy. But at the beginning of the story he is only a blind beggar, condemned by his condition to a life of hopeless deprivation and suffering.

He could not see Jesus, of course. Jesus could see him; but he could not see Jesus, even, we might add, when Jesus stood directly in front of him looking down on him as he sat begging. Perhaps he sensed that someone was there. But he did not know who was there or what his presence signified. It is likely that the man did not greatly value sight, for he had been blind from his birth and hardly had an idea of what it meant to see. Had he lived with good sight for thirty or forty years and then lost it as the result of an accident, or some such thing, we might expect him to have been bemoaning his loss. But he knew none of the world as we receive it through our vision and, hence, could not fully value vision. He knew that he was missing something, of course. But how could he value it properly, having never seen? Finally, notice that he also did not pray for sight. At least, we are not told that he did. He was a beggar. It is a beggar's task to beg. But he did not beg for sight. His condition was hopeless, and what is the use of asking for something that everyone knows cannot happen! The blind man certainly did not expect the miracle that was about to be performed by Jesus.

No, little can be said in favor of this man at the moment Jesus found him. Yet, to be perfectly fair, there is at least one thing. The one circumstance in favor of the blind man is that he was at least in the place where Jesus was likely to go. He had not planned it that way. He

sat at the gate of the temple because thousands of people passed through the gate of the temple and he could ask them for alms. Yet, whether he had planned it or not, this was where Jesus passed by. And Jesus found him.

I wonder if that might not describe many who will read these words. I am sure that it will at least describe some. You are like the blind man. To begin with, you cannot see spiritual truths. You have heard the gospel preached—perhaps you have even been reading the Bible as well as Christian books—but you cannot understand what is said, and you cannot see Jesus. Moreover, you do not even properly value what you are missing. Since you have never understood spiritual truths, you hardly have a sense of what they are and therefore cannot value them. Then, as a consequence of this, you have not prayed to understand them. So far as you are concerned, your condition is as it is, and it will never be changed by anything.

What can be said for you in your condition? There is hardly a good thing that can be said. You are lost and blind, and your condition is hopeless—apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, like the state of the man who had been born blind, there is this at least to be said: you are in a place where Jesus is likely to go. You have not planned it that way, but, nevertheless, you are there. You are reading these words. Perhaps you have been attending a believing church. Perhaps another member of your family has been converted. These are good signs; and I at least am encouraged by them. You cannot see Jesus. But if you are one such as I have been describing, Jesus is seeing you. He is looking down on you, searching you out from head to foot, and thinking of what he is about to do in your life and what he will make of you.

Are you such a one? Then you are just whom he wants. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 9:5). It is with your darkness that he wishes to deal.

The Man Jesus

Second, I want you to look at the man Jesus. I call him "the man Jesus" because this is what the man who had been born blind called him. After he had been healed by Jesus, the neighbors of the man asked, "How were your eyes opened?" They were not even sure that the healed man was the right man; for, although they thought he was the man who had been born blind, he seemed different and they were unable to account for the miracle. "How were your eyes opened?"

The man replied, "The *man they call Jesus* made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. I went and washed, and then I could see" (v. 11).

Jesus is more than a man. The fact that he healed the man who had been born blind is proof of that, and there are many other proofs as well. Jesus is also God. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Ancient of Days. He is Jehovah-jireh, El Elyon, Adonai. He is the Lord of hosts. He is the Savior. Jesus is all these things. And yet—it is also his glory—he is a man, and this is not at all a bad place at which to begin to know him.

What a man he is, this man Jesus! He is a man's man. J. B. Phillips, the author of one of the modern paraphrases of the Bible, sensed this keenly in his translation work and has written of it. "I had deep respect, indeed a great reverence, for the conventional Jesus Christ whom the Church worshipped. But I was not at all prepared for the *unconventional* man revealed in those terse Gospels. No one could possibly have invented such a person: this was no puppet-hero built out of the imaginations of adoring admirers. 'This man Jesus,' so briefly described, rang true, sometimes alarmingly true. I began to see now why the religious establishment of those days wanted to get rid of Him at all costs. He was sudden death to pride, pomposity, and pretence.

"This man could be moved with compassion and could be very gentle, but I could find no trace of the 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild.' He was quite terrifyingly tough, not in a Bulldog

Drummond-James Bond sort of way, but by the sheer strength of a unified and utterly dedicated personality. He once (at least) walked unscathed through a murderous crowd. I have known a few, a very, very few, men who could do that. But then I find that this sheer strength was still His after hours of unspeakable agony in the garden of Gethsemane. Those who were sent to arrest Him 'fell back to the ground.' ...Jesus was a man of such stature and quality that he could remain in command of a situation even when the odds were heavily against him."

This is the kind of man we meet in John 9. Thus, it is no surprise to find that, after his healing, the blind man had thoughts only for Jesus. To this man, Jesus had become the most important person in existence. He did not know much about him; he only knew that he was "the man called Jesus." He had not even seen him; for Jesus had sent him away to the pool of Siloam, where the healing took place. Still, Jesus was closer to him than his neighbors, family, or the Pharisees.

Moreover, his talk was all about Jesus. He told how Jesus had made the clay, how Jesus had anointed his eyes, how Jesus had sent him to wash in the pool of Siloam, and how (as the result of what Jesus had done) he came seeing. Indeed, in one sense, the miracle was not complete until he had been found by Jesus the second time and had come to worship him as Lord.

So it will be with you, if you are found by Jesus. You may not know much about him, but for you it will be "Jesus only." You will be able to sing:

> Jesus paid it all,
> All to him I owe;
> Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow.

May Jesus do for you now that spiritual work that will enable you to see him, believe on him, and, as a result, be able to sing his praises forever.

The Humble Means

Third, there are lessons to be learned from the humble means that Christ employed to perform the miracle. The story tells us that Jesus spit on the ground, made clay from the dust and saliva, and then anointed the sightless eyes of the blind man. Does that offend you? Does it seem inadequate and even foolish? Does it seem harmful? In one sense it probably should; for the gospel, through which God gives spiritual light and sight, is all these things to the unconverted.

It is evidently offensive. For when we speak of it there are those who turn away as though it were coarse, old-fashioned, or beneath their dignity. To these men the age-old gospel of salvation through faith in Christ, who died for our sin, giving his blood as propitiation of God's just wrath—to these men all this seems hopelessly old and irrelevant. It is offensive to some minds. But offensive or not, it is by these means that God saves lost and sinful men. Clay? Yes, but it is clay made by Jesus. Saliva? Yes, but from his mouth. In the same way it is by the gospel declared in the words of Scripture—which came from the mouth of Christ—that God calls men and women to repentance. And it is even by preaching. For, as Paul writes, "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

There are others—we must admit it—to whom the gospel is not so much offensive as it is inadequate. They point to the deep personal and social needs of men and turn from the gospel, trying rather to meet the need through psychiatry, politics, social action programs, and other devices. Well, let them try. It is good to have workers in all fields. Let them do everything they can. Still, while wishing them well, we will not abandon the gospel; for, simple though it may be, the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, believed and acted upon, has transformed millions. The gospel has made countless numbers of men and women into new creatures and, through them, has transformed their environment.

Finally, to some the gospel appears worse than inadequate. It actually appears harmful, just as the anointing of the blind man's eyes with clay might have been supposed to have hindered rather than aided his sight. To such the news of salvation through the unmerited grace of Christ seems actually to encourage sin. For, as they said in Paul's day, "Let us sin, that grace may abound." Is this true? Does our gospel encourage sin? Not at all! On the contrary, the gospel is the greatest purifying power in human life, as every true believer knows. This simple means has been a channel of great blessing and of displaying God's glory.

Will you accept this gospel? If you are still drawing back from it as the leper Naaman drew back from the water of the Jordan River, thinking it to be beneath him, then you have not yet seen your plight to be as desperate as it really is. But if, like the blind man, you know it to be desperate, if you sense that there is no hope for you unless Jesus himself comes into your life and does a miracle—if that is the case, then you will not draw back at the simplicity of that which is preached to you but rather will go on to accept whatever Christ offers and do as he tells you.

The Command

This brings us to our final point: the command. What was it? It was simply, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (v. 7). It was simple; it contains only seven words. It was personal; it was directed to the blind man and to him alone. It involved the test of obedience; for it involved a response to the Lord Jesus Christ. In the same way, the gospel that comes to you is simple— "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." It is personal; you must believe.
Above all, it is a test of obedience; for the question is, "*Will* you believe? Will you trust Jesus?"

If you are hesitating, the blind man can be your guide. For if you are hesitating, you are blinder than he was by far. What did he do? He was blind, but as the old Puritan divine John Trapp quaintly observed, "He obeyed Christ blindly." As a result of his obedience he immediately

received physical sight and entered upon a pathway by which he eventually received true spiritual sight in addition.

What a wonderful thing the Lord Jesus Christ did for this man! What a wonderful thing he is prepared to do for all who obey him! Will you obey him? If so, he will begin by giving you spiritual sight and will end by making all things new.

Chapter 116.
"He Is a Prophet"

John 9:13-17

I would like you to imagine for a moment that someone you know has just recently become a Christian and then ask yourself these questions: (1) From whom is the new Christian likely to receive the most encouragement? and (2) From whom is he likely to hear the most disheartening remarks?

Most of us would probably agree that the answer to the first question is: those through whom he became a Christian in the first place; for they nat-come up with an answer to the second question so easily. What would you say? Many, I am sure, would think that his greatest discouragements would come from those who are avowed enemies of the gospel, perhaps from skeptics or hedonists. Actually, it is probably true that his greatest discouragements would come from those who are outwardly religious, but who do not have the truly transforming love of the Lord Jesus Christ in their hearts.

One commentator says, "The ones who will treat worst the young believer are not open infidels and atheists, but those who are loudest in their religious professions."

Let me give you the following example. A number of years ago my wife and I worked with an older woman who became a Christian at about

fifty years of age. She had been a faithful church woman for most of her life, but she had never actually understood the gospel or placed her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. When she finally understood what it was all about and became a Christian, she found herself filled with joy and her life almost completely transformed. She wanted to tell her minister what happened; so she did. She went to him joyously, thinking that he would rejoice with her. But his reaction was not one of joy. Rather, it was a grim and deflating response. He urged her not to become emotional and above all not to do anything foolish. Later the relationship deteriorated to the point at which he actually asked her to leave his church, and she returned to the small fellowship of people who loved her and through whom she had been saved.

It would be nice if this were a single and unique incident. But, unfortunately, it is not. Instead, it is more like a pattern, and the discouraging words are often sharp barbs and the opposition intense. What about such circumstances? Should the new Christian be encouraged or discouraged? Strengthened or confused? There is a great deal of light to be thrown on this situation by the story of the confrontation between the man who had been born blind (but who had been healed by Jesus) and the Pharisees who were offended by his healing. The conflict was lopsided—between the simple beggar and the self-righteous and cocksure Pharisees. It was intense. But it ended, in spite of the man's excommunication, in his triumph. In short, it was a case of the triumph of fact over theory and of true spiritual experience over closed minds.

The Sabbath Problem

On the surface at least the problem was the old sabbath problem that had arisen early in Christ's ministry. That the man had been healed would have been bad enough, given the facts that he had been healed by Jesus and that the Pharisees hated Jesus for his exposure of their sin. But that he had been healed on the Sabbath and by means of clay that Jesus had made from his spittle and dust—well, this was intolerable!

There was no doubt at all that Jesus had broken the Sabbath—at least as they conceived it. What is more, he had done so previously in the case of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-16) and in other instances. In this case there were at least three ways in which he had broken the sabbath laws. First, by making clay he had made himself guilty of working on the Sabbath. The law clearly said, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates" (Exod. 20:8-10). The rabbis had defined this as meaning that a man could not carry a handkerchief from an upstairs room to a downstairs room; that was carrying a burden, and carrying a burden was work. A man could neither light nor extinguish a lamp. He could not cut his fingernails, nor pull a hair out of his beard. Most certainly he could not spit in the dust to make clay; for making clay was manual labor.

Second, Jesus had broken the Sabbath by healing the blind man. According to rabbinic maxims, it was all right to practice medicine if life was in danger; that is, it was permissible to try to keep the patient from getting worse. But on the other hand, it was forbidden to do anything to make him get better. A doctor could not treat toothache, for instance. A person could not put cold water on a sprain. Clearly, since the man who had been born blind was in no danger of dying from his handicap or of getting blinder, Jesus broke the sabbath laws when he healed him.

Finally, as regards the actual method of healing, the law clearly stated that "as to fasting spittle, it is not lawful to put it so much as upon the eyelids." So, since Jesus had done this, he was obviously guilty on this count also.

Jesus was guilty of breaking the sabbath laws as the rabbis of Israel had constructed them. But these were man-made regulations; and Jesus, who understood God's law perfectly, knew it, and simply disregarded them. Moreover, they were actually harmful. For they were means by which those who were fundamentally incapable of keeping God's true

law nevertheless buttressed themselves up in the conviction that they were doing all right as religious people, that they were going to earn heaven. They also convinced themselves that they did not need God's grace. If they were doing all right, they did not need a Savior. They did not need Jesus. Besides, within their system they could do almost anything they wished—so long as they did not violate the sabbath laws. Thus, they were ready to kill Jesus for breaking the Sabbath, but they were not prepared to let him heal on it. Later they would be ready to have him crucified, so long as the execution took place before sundown on Friday evening.

This was a horrible system. Religious formalism is always horrible. Yet, it was this that confronted the poor beggar when he was ultimately brought before the Pharisees by those neighbors of his who had witnessed the miracle. We can see it now—the leaders, elegant in their robes and secure in their positions, and the beggar, inelegant and insecure—save in Jesus. We can sense the tension. The man was healed. He had been blind for the whole of his lifetime, and now he was healed! We might expect the leaders to have rejoiced with him. But did they? Not at all! Instead, we see them dredging around in the dark recesses of their minds to discover what they can do about this unfortunate event. Can they discredit the miracle and thereby brand the carpenter from Nazareth a fraud? Or—this would be better yet—can they maneuver the testimony of the blind man to trap him?

As a blind man and as a beggar, this man had no interest for the Pharisees. They would have stepped on him as they made their impressive prayers on the street corners. But now, as a healed man, he was interesting in a negative sort of way. Perhaps he could become their tool to trap Jesus.

A Sharpened Testimony

So they began to ask questions, and the first was how he had received sight. Apparently they had already heard the story; the text says, "The Pharisees *also* asked him how he had received his sight." But this was a formal hearing, perhaps even something of a cross-examination. Would

the blind man say something contradictory and thus discredit himself and Jesus? Would he say something that could be used against Jesus? "Tell us again," they said. "Let's hear it from the beginning."

I can almost see the blind man's eyes narrowing as he replies to their question somewhat warily now and quite tersely, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see."

I find this very interesting. For the fact that the man who had been blind replied in such terse language shows that *his testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ was sharpening.* Notice that this version of his testimony is shorter than the version in verse 11. I can imagine that both are shorter than the story he told earlier in the day. Shortly after the healing the man might have told about it with many interesting but irrelevant details. "There I was, sitting by the temple gate," he might have said. "You know, the big one where so many people go in and out. I had gotten there a bit late because there was an unusual number of people on the streets. In fact, back on the other side of the square the crowd was so thick I actually got knocked down. Well, as I was saying, I got there late and took my usual place. You know—off to the right, near the bakery. Then, no sooner was I there than I heard this commotion in the temple courtyard, a great commotion. There was shouting. Someone was yelling, 'Stone him! Stone him!' I listened anxiously. Then the shouting died away and after awhile.... "Well, the story might have gone on like that for a long time with much irrelevant detail. But that would have been earlier in the day. Here, when opposed by the Pharisees, the man does not ramble but instead tells his story pointedly. There was much the Pharisees could question. Much might even be uncertain. But this much was at least clear: Jesus had put clay on his eyes; he had washed; he had come away seeing. Learn that this is what opposition should do to your testimony. It should sharpen it up. When you have great leisure and are among friends, no one will mind (and it may even be quite interesting) if you tell your story with many subjective details. That is all right in those circumstances. But when there is opposition, then something quite different is called for. Your words must count. You must stress basics. What has Jesus done?—that is the important thing.

And—equally important—what happened when you obeyed him? If you are giving such a witness, then your words will be effective. We might even say that it is to develop such an ability, in part at least, that God permits opposition to the Christian's testimony.

Growth in Perception

But there is another reason also, as we will see in the story. The man who had been born blind had given his testimony, and the first thing we notice is that it had been effective. The rulers had begun by questioning him. Now they turned to each other, some at least apparently accepting the reality of the miracle. "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath day," some said. Others replied that he must be of God because it would be impossible for a man who is not of God to do such miracles. They were clearly divided. So the only thing they could think of was to question the blind man again. They asked him for his opinion about Jesus. "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." "He is a prophet," the man answered.

Now here is the second thing we notice. It is the second reason why God often permits opposition to the new Christian's testimony. As a result of the conflict *the man had grown in faith.* He had grown in his perception of Jesus. In his first testimony the man had called Jesus only a man. "The man they call Jesus made some mud," he said. He was quite a man, but still the beggar knew no more than this. By the time we come to this point in the story, the man had come to see that calling Jesus a mere man was not enough; hence, he called him a prophet; that is, one who speaks and acts for God (v. 17). Later he advances to the thought that Jesus is One who is worthy to be a teacher and to have disciples (v. 27), then to the perception that he is "from God" (v. 33). Finally, he comes to believe on him as "the Son of God" to whom worship should be given (v. 38). By contrast, the Pharisees start from the view that Jesus is *not* from God (v. 16), question the miracle (v. 18), call Jesus a sinner (v. 24), acknowledge their ignorance (v. 29), and at last are by Jesus pronounced both blind and sinful (v. 41).

Opposition led the blind man into new understanding, and this should be the effect of opposition on us all—if we are faithful in giving our testimony. If a believer is faithful according to the light that he has, more is given to him. As Jesus said, "Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him" (Luke 8:18). In other words, if you would grow in your knowledge of Jesus, tell others what you know already and do not be afraid of opposition.

Be Bold

We have come to the end of our exposition of these verses, and a few words should be said by way of summary and conclusion. There are three main points and one conclusion. First, if you are a genuine believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, conflict will come. You will not always have conflict, but sooner or later in one form or another you will be opposed for the sake of the gospel. So do not be surprised when it happens. Remember that the Bible says, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). It also says, "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him" (Phil. 1:29).

Second, even though conflict will come, you can know that God will not abandon you in the conflict—any more than he abandoned the man who had been born blind. When he was challenged concerning his opinion of Jesus, the man suddenly answered, "He is a prophet." He may not have been able to say that a moment before, but he did in that instant. In his hour of need divine grace did not fail him but rather enabled him to witness a good confession.

Third, when faced with such situations, you can know that God has his purposes in them and you should be encouraged by that knowledge. There may be many purposes, but among them are at least those two that we have seen in the case of the blind man. Opposition will (1) sharpen your testimony and (2) lead you into a deeper understanding of the gospel.

Finally, we may conclude that we, no less than the man who had been born blind, should be bold in our testimony. If the blind man, who had hardly met the Lord Jesus and knew little about him, was bold, why should we not be? On this point Calvin has written wisely, "If he, who did not yet know that Christ was the Son of God, courageously and freely confessed He was a prophet, how shameful is the treachery of those who out of fear either deny Him or are silent, though they know that He sits at the right hand of the Father and from thence will come to be the judge of the whole earth! If this blind man did not quench his tiny spark of knowledge, we should endeavor that a frank and full confession should blaze forth from the full brightness which has shone in our hearts."

Chapter 117.
We Know, We Know

John 9:18-33

We live in an age that places great value on knowledge. Since Christians have always done the same we might think that ours would be a great age for Christianity. Actually, this is not the case. Christians claim that they know many important things. They *know* whom they have believed (2 Tim. 1:12). They *know* that their Redeemer lives (Job 19:25). They *know* that they have passed from death to life (1 John 3:14). They *know* that all things work together for them for good (Rom. 8:28). They *know* that when the Lord Jesus Christ returns they shall be like him (1 John 3:2). But such claims generally do not mean much to our contemporaries, and Christians often find themselves asking: Do we indeed know what we claim to know? What do we know? Do we know it for certain? And how is it that we know it?

The basis for our study is the report of the interrogations of the parents of the man who had been born blind and the man himself by the leaders of Judaism, as recorded in John 9. The theme is suggested by the

interesting fact that each of the parties is said to have claimed both to know something and not to know something. And since the claims and the reasons for the claims differ, the contrasts afford a means for examining the various types of knowledge, particularly Christian knowledge, as exemplified by the statements of the man who had been born blind.

The parties in the debate are the parents of the man, the Pharisees, and the man himself. We need to look at the claims of each one.

The Parents

The first people who are interrogated are the parents of the man whom Jesus healed. The questioning was an obvious attempt by the Pharisees to discredit the man's testimony; for if they could have gotten the parents to say that the man was not their son or that he was not really blind, then they could have branded the healing a fraud and have attacked Jesus. So they asked, "Is this your son? Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he sees?" (v. 19). The overtones of the question were that the parents were to stop lying and come clean.

They answered, "We know he is our son, and we know he was born blind. But how he can now see or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself (vv. 20-21).

Notice that the parents affirm two things: (1) that the healed man was indeed their son and (2) that he was born blind. This was part of what they knew, and they were not afraid to affirm this. On the other hand, there were also two things they denied knowing: (1) how he came to see and (2) who did the miracle. This latter part was not entirely truthful, as is evident even from their testimony. For if they did not know how he was healed, then they would not have known that any person ("who") was involved. That they spoke of a person shows that they had at least heard the story and knew of Christ's role in it.

Why did they not acknowledge what they knew of Christ's role in the healing? John gives the answer when he says that "they feared the

Jews." For, he says, they knew that the leaders had already agreed to excommunicate anyone who should confess that Jesus was the Messiah. In our terms we would say that the parents simply did not want to get involved. *They knew, but they did not want to know.* They were afraid to acknowledge what had been revealed to them.

This is an accurate picture of many in our age. The truths of Christianity have been proclaimed to them—perhaps by their parents or friends, or through their church. Intellectually they know and even believe such things. But they do not come out and say so. Were the parents of the blind man true followers of Jesus? We do not know. We can hope so. Failing that, we can hope that they became followers later. But we do not know from the story. Like many today they were afraid to acknowledge Christ for fear of the consequences.

The Pharisees

The second group was composed of the Pharisees who were conducting the interrogation. They also say "we know" and "we do not know." Since they had been unable to extract damaging testimony from the parents of the man who had been blind, they again called the man and began to interrogate him more thoroughly. He apparently had not been present during the questioning of his parents, for when he came back the leaders attempted to finesse a damaging admission out of him by pretending that they had learned the true story during his absence. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know this man is a sinner" (v. 24). There was an exchange of comments, and then they amplified their position. "We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from" (v. 29).

Here is another situation in which a group of people claim both to know something and also not to know something. They claimed to know: (1) that Jesus was a sinner, and (2) that God had spoken through Moses. They claimed not to know Christ's origins. Interestingly enough, however, what they claimed and what they denied were contradictory. For one thing, in claiming not to know Christ's origins they contradicted what they are reported to have said earlier—"We know where this man

comes from" (John 7:27). For another, even these statements were contradictory; for if they did not know Christ's origins, they could not know whether he was a sinner or not.

What can describe these men? Unlike the parents, who can be said to have known the truth but were unwilling to admit it, these men can be said to have thought that they knew the truth but actually to have been ignorant of it. *They wanted to know.* They wanted to be known as those who knew. *But where Jesus was concerned they knew nothing.*

Unfortunately, this too describes many in our age, particularly those pseudo-scholars and pseudo-leaders who claim to know all about Christ and Christianity but who have never really come to know Christ personally. This is true of many who write popular books about Jesus, for instance. Every year a number of these books appear, each one pretending to tell the truth about Jesus because the "truth" has become known through some manuscript discovery or some scientific advance. In one, Jesus will be pictured as a Messiah who planned a crucifixion from which he was to be saved in order to convince his followers that he was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies. In another he will appear as the leader of an ancient drug cult. Such books are based on distortions of the most flimsy evidence, while at the same time they neglect the weighty evidence of the Gospels. Do these men know Jesus? Not at all. They are modern-day Pharisees; for although they claim to know and want desperately to know, they know nothing.

The Man Born Blind

The third party in the story is the man who had been born blind. What was his testimony? Quite simply, he readily acknowledged that there was much that he did not know—"Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know" (v. 25). But then he added, "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see" (v. 25). He could not tell his interrogators everything about Jesus. In fact, he was unable to debate the matter of his person. But one thing he did know and that was that Jesus had changed him; and because he knew it and really knew it, no one was going to shake him from his position.

In this the blind man becomes a type of those who are genuine Christians. *They do not know everything*—the finite cannot exhaust the infinite—but *what they do know they know truly.* And they know it because they have met Jesus personally.

Lack of Knowledge

This is worth some reflection. We have summarized the positions of the parents, the Pharisees, and the man who had been healed. What is it that makes the testimony of the healed man different? Why is his approach to knowledge to be emulated?

First, we notice that he, unlike the others, began with *his limitations in knowledge.* That is, he began humbly. Each of the parties in this report said both "we know" and "we do not know." But both the parents and Pharisees said "we know" first and, only after that, acknowledged that there was something they did not know. The parents said, "We know he is our son, and we know he was born blind. But how he sees now ... we don't know." The Pharisees said, "We know that this man is a sinner. ...We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he is from." Both of these groups were most interested in what they did know, and as a result were either cowardly or else knew nothing. The man born blind began with an admission of his ignorance but went on to affirm what he did know as the result of God's revelation.

Here is a great biblical principle. It is that no one can know God by means of the mind or by any other human instrument. The Book of Job asks, "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7). The answer that our hearts must give is no, for "the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

In Christianity we begin with our ignorance, just as we begin with our sin. We acknowledge both our inability in spiritual things and our shortcomings. Thus, we acknowledge that unless God chooses to reveal

himself—which he has done in his Word and in Jesus Christ—we can know nothing.

Second, we notice from what is told us of the blind man that, starting from his own lack of knowledge, he was thereby prepared to recognize *the absence of knowledge in others.* In this case, he recognized the great ignorance of the so-called educated ones, the leaders of the people. This is the most humorous part of the controversy. The Pharisees had come to him with great claims—"we know, we know"—and they had spoken disparagingly of Jesus. "But as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." But this was a fatal admission before their very shrewd witness, and he at once seized upon it.

"Now that is remarkable," he said sarcastically. "You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes" (v. 30). They did not know even the most basic things about Jesus, and the man who had been healed at once saw this—because he had recognized his own limitations.

This sounds contradictory, and yet it is true. Who are those who are most likely to be taken in by authority? We answer: the foolish. But who are the foolish? The answer to that question is not necessarily "those who are uneducated" and most certainly not "those who are aware of their own lack of knowledge." The answer is those who are overly sure of what they think they know. Thus, you will find professors being swept up into foolish theories by other professors, and ministers being led into nonsense concerning Christ by doctors of theology.

Third, having eliminated a false self-confidence as well as an unjustified confidence in the Pharisees, the man who had been born blind was left with *what he truly did know.* "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see" (v. 25). He had eliminated the fringe areas, you see. Oh, he would get to these later. In fact, he would become quite sure of some of them later on. But here, in the midst of the debate, he took his stand upon the certainties; and for him the certainty was that he had been healed by Jesus.

What are your certainties? Do you have any? You do, if you have been touched by Jesus. In this regard I think of Martin Luther. Luther was not always the great victor in debates that we sometimes imagine him to be. He was sometimes pressed into making admissions that he did not intend to make when he first entered the discussion. At Leipzig, in a debate with John Eck, Luther came to admit that the Hussites and other early reformers "were not all wrong." At Worms he admitted that the councils of the church had erred. At times Luther admitted his own lack of knowledge, for, as he said, he was "only a man and not God and was liable to make mistakes." Nevertheless, the more he was pressed, the more certain Luther became of that which he did know—namely, that salvation was by grace through faith and that the Word of God was powerful and would ultimately prevail.

If you are uncertain about spiritual matters, then you need to get your eyes off yourself and others and onto Jesus. What has he done? What has he said? What has he revealed about God? What has he made known to you? Spiritual knowledge is based upon the intervention of God in history and the personal revelation of God by the Holy Spirit to the human soul.

Knowing More

Finally, we notice that what the man who had been born blind truly knew (even though it was small) became the basis upon which *he went on to learn more*. His starting point was only this: that Jesus had healed him. But he went on to develop that point so that he came to know that Jesus was no mere man, but was God.

What the man comes to see in this final exchange with the Pharisees is remarkable—actually, the basic tenets of revealed religion. The Pharisees had argued that Jesus was a sinner, and the blind man had declared himself unable to argue with that proposition. He only knew that Christ had healed him. As he thought about it, however, he found that he could say more. First, he knew that God does not hear sinners; that is, that sinners have no claim upon him. This point involves the whole doctrine of man's spiritual depravity, his hopelessness in sin.

Second, he declared that God does hear those who do his will; that is, those who are in a right relationship to him. This is a declaration of the fact that God has revealed his will and that salvation is possible. Finally, the man argued that since God had heard Jesus in the matter of his own healing, Jesus must be in God's will in a special way and must therefore be "of God." In other words, Jesus becomes the Savior of man because of who he is and of his origins.

So it is for all Christians as they grow in knowledge. They do not know exhaustively, but they do know truly because they know on the basis of God's written and incarnate revelation—and they grow in knowledge. The Scriptures say, "The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn shining ever brighter till the full light of day" (Prov. 4:18).

Chapter 118.
Last Resort of the Unconverted

John 9:34

The last resort of the unconverted is, simply, to refuse to listen. The subject comes to us from John 9:34. This verse concludes the report of the conversation between the man who had been born blind (but who had been healed by Jesus) and the Pharisees. The man who had been blind had seen the true purpose of the Pharisees' questioning—they were trying to trap Jesus—and he had begun to rebuke them for their unbelief. They were offended, naturally. So we read, "To this they replied, 'You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!' And they threw him out."

This is our text. It teaches that being defeated by the man's arguments, the Pharisees tried excommunication rather than acknowledge Christ's claims.

This is something that often happens. Sometimes it is official, as in this case. At other times it is more disguised. Not long ago I heard of a

couple who were witnessing to one of their relatives by sending him books and other Christian literature. The material was received for a time, but eventually the answer came back—"I am glad to receive letters from you, but I am tired of receiving the literature. Please stop." They had to stop; but, fortunately, the relative later became a Christian through other channels. In many instances a person does the same thing by changing the subject whenever spiritual matters are brought up. To give one final example, I learned of a case in which a woman was witnessing to a certain man who became so exasperated by her witness that he knocked her down. In this case the man himself did not become a Christian, but another man who saw the incident began coming to church as a result, and eventually believed on Jesus.

There are many different ways of closing one's mind to the gospel; and it is one of these, a means often used by religious leaders, that we find in our story. The blind man was excommunicated. We also find this repeated many times in church history.

Four Attempts

To understand this fully we need to understand that excommunication was only the last of four attempts by the Pharisees to avoid the supernatural support that the miracle of healing gave to Christ's claims. The Pharisees did not refuse to listen at first. They began by trying to discredit the miracles, or, as they would have said, to uncover the true story. When that failed they tried to separate the miracle from Jesus; that is, they did not deny that the healing had taken place, but they denied that Jesus was the cause. Third, they retreated into law—"We know that God spoke to Moses." It was only at the last, when these attempts had proved inadequate, that they threw out the blind man.

The most interesting thing about these attempts to avoid the force of Christ's claims is that they are precisely the attempts that have been played out in church history.

Take the first one. This was the attempt to uncover the "true" story behind the healing and so do away with the miracle. It was what was

involved in the early questioning of the man and his parents. We see this particularly in the nineteenth century. This might even be called the history of the nineteenth century so far as biblical scholarship is concerned. In the nineteenth century, rationalists, who had become rationalists as the result of their secular educations, confronted the obviously supernatural element in the biblical narratives. These men called themselves Christians, which meant that they had to have some well-thought-out relationship to the Bible.

But here were books, claiming to be by eyewitnesses of the events of biblical history, in which the supernatural was prominent. What were they to do? The only thing to do was to attempt to discredit the miracles. So, many years were spent in trying to explain how what seemed to be miracles actually happened. Thus, we find men writing that, in the incident referred to in John 6, Jesus was not actually walking upon the water but rather was standing in shallow water at the lake's edge. He was thought to be walking on water because the night was dark and cloudy and the disciples thought that they were still far from land. Or again, the miracle of the multiplying of the loaves and fishes was said to be accomplished through the foresight of the disciples who had stored sufficient food in a cave and who passed it up secretly to Jesus who, thereby, seemed to be making it multiply. Others suggested that what actually happened was that all the people, moved by the generosity of the young lad, shared their lunch.

It is hard to believe today that such theories were actually taken seriously. But they were, and in some cases they were obviously made in good faith. The men who made them thought that by stripping away the supernatural they would get to the true heart of the story, like getting to the nut after taking off the shell. What they found was that they were dealing with something more like an onion than a walnut. What happens when you take away the outer layer of an onion? You find another layer inside. Take away that layer, and another layer is visible. By the time all the layers are removed there is nothing left. This is precisely what happened in biblical scholarship. The supernatural was removed, but there was nothing left—at least nothing that was even vaguely reminiscent of Christianity. To summarize: the scholarship of

the nineteenth century resulted in this, either a supernatural Bible with a supernatural Christ or no Bible and no Christ at all. The interesting thing is that in following this line of study it turned out to be the scholars themselves (like the Pharisees), rather than the miracles, who were discredited.

The second attempt by the Pharisees was to separate the miracle from Jesus. That is, they accepted the miracle—they could hardly deny it—but they denied that Jesus (whom they hated) was the one responsible. The argument went: "Give glory to God. We know this man is a sinner" (v. 24).

Unfortunately, this too has been played out in history. One example is theological. Following their failure in the nineteenth century to discredit the miraculous, scholars tried to divorce the socalled heart of Christianity from anything objective; that is, to divorce Christian experience from the actual life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. It is not so much what Jesus actually said and did that is important, we were told, but rather what Jesus means to Christians today. It would not matter if the body of Jesus should be found as the result of some archaeological expedition, so the argument went. That would disprove a literal, bodily resurrection. But the important thing is that what Jesus stood for continues to live in our hearts. That would continue in spite of the discovery. The answer to this argument is that it would not continue. In fact, if it were not for the literal resurrection of Jesus, there would be nothing to continue, for Christianity would have been forgotten about and buried long ago. No one can successfully separate cause from effect. So if there is a genuine Christian experience, there must be a genuine Christ, the Christ of the Gospels, to account for it. Without this cause there is no valid experience and no Christianity.

The attempt to separate Christianity from Christ is done in less scholarly ways whenever a person attempts to explain away conversion to Christ by calling it the product of wishfulfillment, escapism, high-pressured sales techniques on the part of an evangelist, or some such thing. This is an attempt to separate the results of conversion from the Christ who has produced the conversion, and this too is foolish.

Besides, it will never have much effect on the one who is converted. If he has really met Christ, he knows that the historic, objective Christ is inseparable from the experience.

Third, the Pharisees retreated into law or, as we could equally well say, into tradition. They could not discredit the miracle. They could not separate the miracle from Jesus. So they said in effect, "We do not know how this happened or what part Jesus may have had in it, but we do know that God has spoken to us through Moses; and this is all we need to know. So don't bother us. We are all right with our traditions." It is sad but true that traditions, even good traditions, have closed many hearts to the gospel.

The blind man also challenged this attempt to escape Christ's miracle. For he pointed out, rightly, that even the principles of the law encourage belief in Jesus. Would they retreat into traditions? Well, the best of these traditions should have caused them to be looking for Christ, to have recognized him when he came, and to have followed him and to have believed on him as the Savior. At this point, the Pharisees simply closed their ears and had the man removed from their assembly.

Strong Testimony

This brings us to the excommunication itself and to the fact that it often is the inevitable result of strong testimony. Fail to confess Christ, go along with the world and its values, compromise the standards of Christian conduct, and the world will welcome you. But confess Christ boldly, live as a Christian, and you will soon find yourself unwelcome in the world's assemblies.

A number of years ago, during the First World War, Donald Grey Barnhouse had the opportunity of leading the son of a prominent American family to the Lord. The young man was in the service. So when he professed to accept Christ as his Savior, he immediately made public testimony to that fact among the soldiers of his company. In time the war ended and the day came when he was to return to his prewar life in the wealthy suburb of a large city. He talked to Barnhouse about

it and shared his fears that he might soon slip back into his old habits among his old friends. Barnhouse told him that he would not have to give these people up. Instead, they would give him up—if he made public confession of his faith in Jesus Christ. As a result of their conversation the young man agreed to tell the first ten people of his old set whom he met that he had become a Christian.

The soldier left his unit and went home. Almost immediately—in fact, while he was still at the suburban station at the end of his return trip—he met a girl whom he had known. She was delighted to see him and asked how he was doing. He told her, "The greatest thing that could possibly happen to me has happened."

"Oh," she exclaimed, "you're engaged to be married!" "No," he told her. "It's even greater than that. I have taken the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior." The girl's expression froze; she mumbled a few polite words and quickly went on her way. A short time later the new Christian met a young man whom he had known. The young man informed him that there would be some good parties now that the soldier had returned. "I've just become a Christian," the soldier said. Again it was a case of frozen smiles and a quick change of conversation. After this the same circumstances were repeated with a young couple and with two more old friends. By this time the word had gotten around, and soon friends stopped seeing him. He had become peculiar, religious, and—who knows?—they may even have called him crazy! What had he done? Nothing but confess Christ! But the same confession that had aligned him with Christ had separated him from those who did not want him.

So it will be for all who are faithful in their testimony. If you are a Christian, it is not good to be spoken well of by everyone (Luke 6:26). All will not believe. And yet, you are to bear a testimony so that by the grace of God you might win some.

The Arms of Jesus

Finally, we need to see the results of the Pharisees' action upon the man who had been blind. In the first place, it was a great honor for this man.

He might not have felt it and was probably a dejected man when Christ later found him and revealed himself to him. Nevertheless, it was an honor to him to be ejected from the company of those who would not have Jesus.

So it is today. Believe me when I say that it is an honor to be thrown out of some churches. It was an honor when Martin Luther was expelled from the Roman Church in the sixteenth century. It was an honor when Calvin was forced to leave France for Geneva because of his testimony. Thus were the Waldenses, Huguenots, Covenanters, and Puritans treated. Thus are some treated today, and it is not tragic. It is an honor, as I have said. In many cases excommunication has been the brightest moment of some Christians' careers.

But then notice what the excommunication did. The gospel tells us that the Pharisees cast the man out. This was true. But to what did they cast him out? They cast him into the arms of Jesus. If there had been no one waiting, this might have been bad. It would have been bad to have been alone—without family, friends, spiritual counselors, or the benefits of the synagogue. But to be cast into the arms of Jesus—well, what could be better than that? His are great arms. In his arms we can each find all we need. Do you need strength? The arms of Jesus are strong arms. Do you need love? The arms of Jesus are loving arms. Do you need comfort and protection? You will find comfort and protection there. Jesus is waiting. Do not be afraid. The Scriptures say, "Though my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me" (Ps. 27:10).

It is easy to apply these truths to each person who is reading this book. If you are a Christian, first of all, do not be afraid to witness. Be bold in your witness. The worst that can happen is that you will be rejected, but that is not bad if at the same time you are received by Jesus. So do not hesitate to be identified with Jesus. Speak and allow him to use your testimony. Tell what you know and allow God to use that in bringing many others to the Savior.

Finally, if you are not yet a Christian, why should you not learn from this story? I do not say that you have been doing all that the Pharisees

did, or, if you have been doing these things, that you have been doing them consciously. Yet this may be the case. You may have been trying to deny the miracles. That is why those popular books that seek to explain the "true" origins of Christianity appeal so strongly to you. Perhaps you have been seeking to detach the fruit of Christian experience from Jesus. That is why you are so concerned to prove that a Christian you know has become a Christian only because someone has pressured him into it or because he is seeking to fulfill some inner need. Perhaps you have been retreating into tradition. Perhaps you are just refusing to listen. I do not know where you stand, but if you stand here, do not refuse to listen any longer. Open your ears. Hear the voice of Christ. Believe him. Turn to him. Throw yourself upon him. Receive him as your Savior.

Chapter 119.
A Question for Everyone

John 9:35-38

We have already studied the story of the man who had been born blind sufficiently to be aware of the situation at this point. The man had been healed by Jesus. But as the result of his healing and of his testimony before the Pharisees, the man had been rejected, first by his family and friends, then by his church and nation. The man was undoubtedly dejected. Yet, this man, who had been rejected by everyone else, was not rejected by Jesus. We read that Jesus, when he heard that the man had been excommunicated, sought him out and asked him a question. It is unlikely that there are many reading this who have literally been excommunicated, though there may be some. Nevertheless, I am sure that many are in a similar condition. You feel cut off from other people and perhaps from God. It may even be that you have cut yourself off, for the knowledge of what you have done burns in your conscience, telling you that there is no hope for you of God's pardon. If that is the

case, then you must listen to this great question and answer it. It is a question by which God can do you good.

Notice that this was Jesus' purpose in asking the question of the man who had been born blind. Unasked, he had been healed by Jesus. Unsought, he had been found by Jesus. Now, by this question he is helped to make a considerable advance in his faith. The man knew something about his benefactor already. He knew that he was a man called Jesus (v. 11). He had come to see that he was a prophet (v. 17). Later he began to understand that Jesus was from God; for, as he said, "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (v. 33). Nevertheless, the man who had been blind still did not know all that Jesus intended for him to know. So Jesus came with a question that was to bring him to the place where he was able to fall down and worship him—"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

This was the question by which Jesus sought to do the man good, and it is the question by which I seek to do you good at this moment. Will you ask it of yourself? There is no more important question that can either be asked or answered.

An Important Question

Let me justify the fact that this is an important question. It is important, first of all, because it concerns salvation, and salvation is important. Here is a picture of Jesus coming to a man whom he had helped physically (he had enabled him to see) and whom he had also helped intellectually. But these two areas of life were relatively unimportant compared with the salvation of the man spiritually. So Jesus asked a question designed to quicken his faith and lead him to place his trust in Jesus himself regarding salvation. The situation is repeating itself today. There are many things in your mind that you think are important and that the world judges to be important, but none of them are as important as the great matter of salvation that I am pressing upon you. Do you believe on Jesus? The Bible stresses the importance of this matter when

it asks properly, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36).

Second, the question is important because it concerns the only way of salvation. It is not the case that there are many roads, all of which lead to heaven. Many believe this, but it is not true. It is not the case that there are many ways by which a man can become right before God, but rather that Jesus is himself "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). It is because of who Jesus is that he is able to save sinners. He is God and, as God, is able to die for an infinite number of sins. He does what no mere man can do. Therefore, salvation is by him, through him, in him, of him. Indeed, as the Scriptures say, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

In Christianity salvation is something achieved by Jesus. Hence, Jesus is at the center of
Christianity as no other individual is in any other religion. When Buddha, just prior to his death, was asked by his disciples how best they might remember him, Buddha replied that they were not even to trouble themselves by such a question. His point was that it did not matter whether or not they remembered him. What mattered was his teaching, his teaching of the *Way.* In this respect, his teaching had the characteristics nearly of a truth of science, which exists entirely apart from the one who discovers it. This is not the way of Christian truth, for Jesus pointed men and women to himself. In our text he asks, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Later he instituted the Lord's Supper with the words, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me. ...This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24-25).

A person can gain a better feeling for the importance of Jesus as the sole way of salvation by imagining how the situation with the man who had been healed might have been approached by someone from another religion or with another commitment. If this had been Buddha himself or another teacher of an eastern religion, the teacher might have spoken

to the man of the unimportance of the details of this life. The important thing is peace of mind, he might have been told. Therefore, the proper course is detachment as a first step in attaining to the divine life. If this had been one of our modern churchmen, the churchman might have been distressed by the rupture between the man who had been born blind and Judaism. Without Judaism he was cut off from the sacraments of Israel. Hence, the proper course (the man would have been told) would be a reconciliation with the religious leaders. If the man had been approached by one of our modern pastors, the kind who feels that pastoral counseling is more important than a proclamation of the Word of God, the healed man might have been asked to explore his own feelings and see whether he might not be able to accept the situation. This was not Jesus' way. Jesus was concerned with the man's salvation, and he knew that the man's salvation depended at its base upon the man's relationship to himself. Did he believe on Jesus? That was the question. So Jesus comes asking him about it—"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

Do you believe in the Son of Man? The question is important because it concerns salvation and because it concerns belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as the sole means of salvation.

No Substitute

Third, the question is important because of the fact that no other experience eliminates the need to answer it. Think of this man for a moment. Think of all that he had already gone through. First of all, he had already been *obedient* to Jesus. Jesus had found him by the temple gate, had made clay of the dust, and had anointed the blind man's eyes. Jesus had said, "Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam." This the man did. We are told that as a result of his obedience he found himself seeing. Moreover, we do not read even of any hesitation in the man's obedience. He might have hesitated. He might have argued that the pool was far away and that nothing was to be gained by washing, so far as he could discern. But he was not another Naaman, who hesitated on the banks of the Jordan—"Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of

Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel?" (2 Kings 5:12). The blind man obeyed immediately and without quibble. Still the Lord came to him with the great question, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The question needed to be asked even though the blind man had been unhesitatingly obedient.

It is the same with many. You may not have been obedient to what you know of Christ's teachings; if so, it is a fault. But you may have been obedient, and even then you need to face this question: "Do you believe on Jesus?" No religious observances, however perfectly carried out, can save you. You must believe on Jesus.

Then too, the man had passed through considerable *experiences* as the result of his obedience. He had been born blind, but as the result of Jesus' intervention in his life he had come to see. How could he forget the long years of darkness? He had lived in the dark throughout his youth and through much of his manhood. But now Jesus had healed him, and the light that he had never known before streamed in upon him. Here was a great change. It was a great experience. Still he needed to answer Christ's question: "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

In the same way, the question needs to be asked of such persons today. Are you one who has tried to substitute religion, even Christian experience, for true faith? Perhaps you have been to a meeting in which the preaching has been eloquent and the spirit enthusiastic. Perhaps you have been moved to tears in such a meeting. Perhaps you have even come forward in response to an invitation. Perhaps you have received the so-called baptism of the Holy Spirit so that you have been able to speak in tongues or some such thing. Even you need to face this question. Experiences do not save anyone. Only Jesus saves. Consequently, you need to examine your relationship to him. Do you believe on Jesus? Jesus knows that changes have taken place in your life, just as he knew that changes had taken place in the life of the man who had been born blind. Yet he presses this question upon you.

Notice also that the blind man had borne a courageous *testimony* for Jesus, yet he still needed to answer this question. And what a great

testimony he gave! It was not more than he knew. It was all that he knew. It was so well grounded in fact and so well supported by reason that it confounded the arguments even of the religious leaders of his day. Yet Jesus seeks him out and asks him this question. Are you such a one? Perhaps you have grown up in a Christian church and have even been asked to give a testimony on occasion. You have done it. You have spoken of the blessing of God in your life. You have spoken of Jesus, perhaps even of the fact that he died on the cross and that you are thankful that he loved you enough to do it. Yet you have never really believed on him. Such things are possible. And since they are possible the question I am asking is for everyone. Do you believe on Jesus? This question is for elders. It is for deacons. It is for Sunday school teachers. It is for parents, grandparents, and children. Do you believe on the Son of God? God grant that you may be able to answer that affirmatively and with full confidence.

Finally, notice that the man had also *suffered* for the cause of Christ. He gave his testimony to Christ and then had been thrown out of the synagogue. He was a dejected man when Christ found him. Still Jesus asked this question. In the same way, you may have suffered for Christ's cause and still have failed to believe on him unto salvation. Have you believed? Do not fail to ask yourself this question today and do not fail to answer it as Jesus wants you to do. Say, "Yes, Lord, I do believe on you. I believe that you died for my sin, and I do place my faith in you for salvation."

An Inescapable Question

A few more things need to be said in conclusion. First, you need to know that if you do not face this question now, you must face it later; for the question itself is inescapable. The very nature of the question makes it inescapable. Your answer must be a yes or a no. A maybe is a no. A delayed answer is a no. Even to fail to answer it entirely is a no. So if you have heard it, you must answer it. In addition, however, it is also true that you must answer it in the day of God's judgment, even if you have tried to avoid it in this life. This will be the basis of God's

judgment. Have you believed on Jesus? If you have not yet believed, now is the time to do so.

Second, you should know that the question can be settled now. Perhaps you have agreed with me that this question is important, and you want to believe. Well, then, you can. In one of his messages, the great Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon tells of a pastor whom he knew who had become converted suddenly in the midst of one of his own sermons. The pastor was much like the man who had been born blind. He had obeyed Christ. He had passed through considerable spiritual experience. He had witnessed for Christ. He had even suffered for him to some degree. Nevertheless, he was not converted. One Sunday as he was preaching he was taken up with the truth of the gospel. He was so taken up with it, in fact, that it affected his normal mode of speaking and he found himself declaring the truth concerning Christ's death with utmost conviction. The congregation began to notice the change. At last a Methodist, who was in the church, shouted out, "The preacher is converted; hallelujah!"

The others said, "Well, we believe he is too."

The pastor stopped preaching and added, "I believe you are right. Something wonderful has happened to me. I do believe on Jesus." Then all together they stood and sang "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." The question can be settled now. It can be settled instantly.

Finally, you should know that if you are having difficulty answering this question, you can have help from Jesus. You may be saying, "I would like to answer yes to this question, but I do not know that I can. I am not sure that Jesus is the Son of God or that I can believe on him." If that is the case, do what the man who had been born blind did. Ask Jesus to help you.

The man had been cast out, and Jesus had come to him asking, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

The man did not know whether he did or not because he did not know who the Son of Man was. So he turned to Jesus and asked him, "Who is

he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him" (v. 36).

At this point Jesus revealed himself to the blind man. He answered his question, "You have seen him now; in fact, he is the one speaking with you" (v. 37). As a result the man born blind believed and worshiped him.

If you are having difficulty with these matters, turn to the One who helped the blind man. He has already helped you much or you would not even be considering the question. You would not even understand what it means unless he had already given you understanding. Well, then, turn to him. Ask him, "Who is he, Lord, that I should believe on him?" If you do, he will point you to himself and will lead you to true faith. Do you believe in the Son of Man? Let your heart say, "Yes, I believe." Then tell someone else about it.

Chapter 120.
Are We Blind Also?

John 9:39-41

I am fairly certain that the biblical writers never heard a joke in the "good news/bad news" category. But I am equally certain that the apostle John would have understood if someone had told him that parts of his Gospel have those characteristics. A good news/bad news joke is one like that involving the captain of a slave galley. The captain comes to the slaves one morning and asks them to put down their oars. Then he says, "Gentlemen, I have some news for you. Some of it is good and some of it is bad. I'm going to give you the good news first. Tomorrow we're going to dock at Caesarea, and you will all be getting shore leave. There will be plenty of parties, and you can all do anything you want. Now, the bad news. Today, the admiral wants to go water skiing."

Parts of John's Gospel have those characteristics. Thus we find a statement of the best news— that anyone who believes on the Lord

Jesus Christ will be saved—followed by the worst, namely, that any who do not believe not only will be condemned but are condemned already. The difference lies in the fact that in John's case the good news/bad news is not funny.

This comparison is seen in the third chapter between verses 16 and 18—"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish. ...Whoever does not believe stands condemned already." The contrast appears in chapter 12, in the words of Jesus—"I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. ...There is a judge for the one who rejects me, and does not accept my words" (vv. 46, 48). The same is found in our text. In the verses we have just looked at we have discovered a great question used by Jesus to assist the growth in faith of the man born blind— "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" Now we see the dark side of the matter, as Jesus declares, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind" (John 9:39).

Christ's Present Judgment

The way in which the statement is put should at once show us the nature of the present judgment about which Christ is speaking. It should also help us understand why there is no real contradiction between this verse and others in which Jesus says that he has not come to judge. In 12:47 Jesus says, "I did not come to judge the world but to save it." But that verse obviously is speaking of the immediate object of his coming-to die for our sin. In our text he is speaking of the indirect moral effect on everybody of his presence in the world, according to which some believe on him and others reject him.

We are helped to understand the nature of this effect by the illustration regarding the sun's light that we used earlier. The purpose of the sun is to warm things and make plants grow. Coupled with the effect of the warm spring rains the sun will make seeds germinate and will bring plants to flower and trees to foliage. At the same time, however, the light will also drive away the creatures of darkness, so that bugs and

crawly things will slither away into dark places if the light of the sun is suddenly made to shine upon them. These were precisely the effects that the Lord Jesus Christ had on his contemporaries. He was the light of the world, as he said (John 8:12; 9:5). As the light of the world he caused faith to sprout and that which was alive spiritually to grow. A perfect example is the growth of the man who had been born blind. On the other hand, he also repelled the religious leaders who, as creatures of darkness, hated him and wished to extinguish his light.

In these concluding remarks on the incident of the healing of the blind man, Jesus says this in terms of blindness and sight. To some, like the man born blind, he was the restorer of spiritual sight. To others, like those who thought they could see, he caused an even greater darkness.

Moreover, if this was true of the moral effect of his life (which it is), it is more true of the effect of his death by crucifixion; for it is at the cross that the division concerning Christ is most apparent. Most persons do not have trouble accepting Jesus of Nazareth as a teacher. There have been many teachers in the long course of the world's history. There will be many more. We would be badly off without them. Hence, Jesus as a teacher is not offensive. But Jesus crucified—well, that is another matter. For a Jesus crucified speaks of man's inability to save himself, of the supremacy of Jesus by which he alone is able to make atonement for sins, of the truth that there is only one way of salvation, and that there is a future judgment against sin for any who reject him. Because of these truths the cross is indeed a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, as the apostle Paul discovered through his preaching (1 Cor. 1:23).

Years ago, on a trip through the western part of the United States, I visited a point along the Continental Divide high in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado at which the waters of a small stream separate in order to begin two long and very diverse journeys, one leading to the Atlantic Ocean on the eastern coast of the United States, the other to the Pacific Ocean on the west. The dividing point is a rock in the middle of the stream. One drop of water striking that rock might turn west, with the result that it would flow into a small stream that in turn flowed into

another one and another one until it entered the White River of Utah, then the Grand River, followed by the Colorado, the Gulf of California, and eventually the Pacific Ocean. Another drop, turning east, would flow through various small streams into the North Platte River and from there into the Missouri, Mississippi, Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic. The destinies of the two drops are entirely different, though the turning point is a very small one at the rock. In the same way, the cross of Jesus is the rock that is the true turning point in man's destiny. Those who believe enter into eternal life and go on to eternal happiness in the presence of God. Those who reject Christ reject God and go on being separated from him forever.

So the conclusion of the first part of the study is this. Take heed to your relationship to Christ. Your relationship to him is not inconsequential. How you respond to him determines your destiny. Will you reject him? Or will you believe? The story of the blind man is told so that you and I might be like the blind man and believe on Jesus, rather than being like the Pharisees.

Those Who Are Blind

The verses we are studying also give indication of what is wrong with those who will not believe on Jesus. That is, it reveals their characteristics.

One characteristic is that they have no sense of need. They are all right by their own standards, and since they do all right by their own standards they imagine that they will do all right by God's. This is the point of the question that the religious leaders asked Jesus. He had just stated that one purpose of his coming into the world was to cause those who see to become blind. He did not mean by this that those who rejected him could actually see spiritually, but rather that they thought they could see (though actually blind) and therefore would not come to Jesus. But this offended them more. So they asked—we must understand the question to have been asked sarcastically—"Are we blind too?" (v. 40). The point of the question was to highlight how ridiculous the teaching of Jesus was in their opinion. How could he

suggest that they might be blind? If he did, his opinion could hardly be taken seriously. Pharisees blind? How hilarious! Yet they were blind, and they showed it nowhere more strongly than in their total absence of a sense of need.

The second characteristic of these men was that they considered the teachings of Jesus foolish.
They had dismissed them as foolishness before—"Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?" (8:48). They would do so again—"Many of them said, 'He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?'" (10:20). But they considered Christ's teachings to be foolish because they did not want to hear him and because their own judgment had been blinded by sin.

Finally, these men were also characterized as being guilty for their sin in rejecting Jesus. There is an interesting twist to the conversation that indicates this. When the Pharisees asked sarcastically, "Are we blind too?" they undoubtedly expected Jesus to answer that indeed they were. This was only what they could expect from one whom they had opposed so forcefully. But Jesus does not say this. It is true that in one sense they were blind. The story of the healing of the blind man is told to make this point among others. Nevertheless, Jesus does not actually say this in his reply. He turns it a bit and, instead of saying, "Yes, you are blind," he says that if they actually were blind, they would be guiltless. That is, they would have an excuse. But they were not totally blind. They knew the Scriptures and therefore were guilty. In the context of this discussion Jesus can only mean that they are guilty before the law, for it is a sin for men who know the law to act as they do. Leon Morris, one of the best commentators on John's Gospel, says, "His meaning is that they have enough spiritual knowledge to be responsible. Had they acted on the best knowledge they had they would have welcomed the Son of God. But they did not act on this. They claimed to have sight, but acted like the blind. Therefore their sin is not taken away. It remains with them."

Those Who Come

These, then, are the characteristics of those who are offended by Jesus. They are unaware of their need. They consider the teachings of Christ foolish. They are guilty before the great God with whom they have to do. How different are the characteristics of those who come to him!

First of all, these admit their need. They cannot see, but, like the blind man, they know they cannot see. They know that their case is hopeless unless the God of miracles should help them.
Second, they have all met Jesus and have found his teachings both comforting and reasonable.
There may be much they do not understand, but what they do understand makes sense. Therefore, they want to learn more. Third, they have obeyed Jesus. He has anointed their eyes, and they have gone to the source of living water, the Word of God, with which they have washed the clay away and then have returned seeing. Finally, and as the result of these things, they have found themselves growing in the knowledge of him and have found themselves worshiping at his feet. None of this has been due to themselves or to their spiritual ability—they have none—but solely to the grace of God that sought them out and healed them unasked. Such are God's children. Such are those who believe and whose guilt is washed away by Christ's blood.

Jesus died for these people. His death was the atonement for their sins so that the guilt of their sin might never rise up before them again. As a result of that death their sin has been removed as far as the east is from the west. It is blotted out as with a thick cloud. It is buried in the depths of the sea. It is forgiven, forgotten, and gone. As a result of Christ's death God is able to clothe these, his people, with the robes of Christ's righteousness, so that they might stand before him as acceptably as Jesus himself. He has made them heirs with Christ of all his riches. He has made them a kingdom of priests unto himself forever.

In which camp are you? Which way have you turned at Christ's cross? Is the gospel good news or bad news for you? If you have not yet believed, then the fullest extent of the good news is to be found in the

fact that it is not too late for you to believe on Jesus. Believe on him. Even now you can find him to be the doorway to salvation.

A Future Judgment

We could certainly stop at this point, and it would be nice to do so. But since we are thinking of Christ's role as a divider of men, it is only honest to point out that his greatest acts in filling that role are yet future. They are those associated with his role in the final judgment, spoken about in many places in Scripture.

One such reference is from Acts. In that book, in the seventeenth chapter, there is a report of one of Paul's great sermons delivered on Mars Hill in Athens to an assembled crowd of Greeks. First, Paul speaks of the Greeks' obvious awareness of a divine being. He adds to this that they are also obviously unsure of who God is and of his nature. They worship him ignorantly, Paul says; and God has been patient. In these days, however, God calls upon all men to repent—that is, to turn from sin and to take sides with Christ—declaring that they must do so in that "he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). It is possible to repent now, says Paul, but it will not always be so. For one day the same Christ who is an indirect divider of men now will be directly active in judgment, sin will be punished, and those who will not repent will be separated from God forever.

Are you saying as you read these words, "What are you trying to do, frighten me?" If you are saying this, I must admit that in a sense I am; for I could desire so to frighten you that you would turn from your sin and blindness to Christ, becoming God's son or daughter, and thereby not be frightened in a greater sense in the day of Christ's last judgment.

Suppose that a group of criminals has kidnapped your son and is holding him hostage. They think they cannot be discovered. But through the work of the police their hideout is detected and the building surrounded. Suddenly in the midst of their supposed peace and safety,

the door bursts open and you and the armed officers enter. There is your son, and there are the gangsters. What is the attitude of each? The attitude of your child is one of delight and love as he immediately springs from his corner and rushes toward you. The attitude of the gangsters is of fright and a knowledge of their certain doom. So it will be at Christ's second coming to render his permanent judgment. Therefore, if the Bible and those who teach it do speak of judgment, it is that you might fear that greater fear and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ while there is hope.

Today the hand of God is extended toward you in grace. Will you not take that hand and receive the amnesty God offers? The doom of future judgment is one we all deserve, but it is one that Jesus has taken on himself for all who will trust him. Trust him, and ask him to be your Savior.

Chapter 121.
The Parable of the Good Shepherd

John 10:1-6

John 10 is a wonderful chapter in this most wonderful of books, rightly beloved by Christians everywhere. The reason lies in its striking portrait of Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd and of ourselves as his sheep.

That this portrait has been beloved by Christians from every culture and from every period of history is easy to demonstrate, for the evidence abounds in Christian art and literature. A number of years ago on one of my trips through Italy, I had opportunity to visit Ravenna and spend some time among the masterpieces of Byzantine art and architecture to be found there. I thought that one of these was particularly interesting. On one of the walls of the burial chamber of Galla Placidia, a sister of one of the early Byzantine emperors, there is a mosaic portraying Christ as the Good Shepherd. He is seated on a low outcropping of rock, holding a shepherd's staff in the form of a cross, while the sheep gather

around him. He strokes the head of one sheep. One sheep looks on. Another seems to be wandering away. In the background, water bursts from a rock in the midst of a verdant garden. The whole is composed of the softest shades of blue, green, yellow, and gold. No one who has seen that picture can miss the thought that the one who follows Christ will not lack any good thing. The artist seems to have been saying of him:

> The LORD is my shepherd; I shall
> not be in want. he makes me lie
> down in green pastures,
> he leads me beside
> quiet waters, he
> restores my soul.

Christ's sheep will indeed be provided with all good things and will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

It is not just in the Twenty-third Psalm that this image is found, however. It is found in many places throughout the Old and New Testaments. The psalmist wrote, "We are his people, the sheep of his pasture" (Ps. 100:3). Isaiah declared, "He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young" (Isa. 40:11). Mark wrote that Jesus had pity upon the crowds because "they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34). Before his crucifixion Jesus referred to Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering servant, saying, "You will all fall away, ...for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered'" (Mark 14:27). The author of Hebrews spoke of Jesus as the "great Shepherd" (Heb. 13:20). Peter saw him as the "Chief Shepherd" to whom the undershepherds are responsible (1 Peter 5:4).

From this rich mine of biblical imagery the parable of the Good Shepherd, which begins the tenth chapter of John's Gospel, is taken. "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes

ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice" (John 10:1-5).

The image speaks to us of the underlying sympathy between the shepherd and his sheep and of the unfailing love and vigilance of the Great Shepherd.

Shepherds, Thieves, and Sheepfolds

In view of the wide use of the shepherd theme throughout the Bible one would think that the shepherd parable in John 10 would be easy to interpret. But this is not the case, if we are to judge by the various interpretations given to it. In one interpretation the sheepfold is the world. In another it is the church. In a third it is heaven. In one interpretation the sheep are all mankind, in another only the Jews. All would agree that the shepherd is Jesus. But who is the porter? Who are the thieves? And how can Jesus be both the shepherd and the door of the sheepfold at the same time?

I believe that these diverse views arise from a failure (1) to take the story in context and (2) to recognize that Jesus is playing upon various aspects of the shepherd imagery, much as a composer might develop variations upon a musical theme.

The greatest failure is to neglect to take the story in its context. It is to be found in the preceding chapter in the story of the man born blind and in his mistreatment by those who were the leaders of the people. This is obvious because of the absence of any transitional words at the beginning of chapter 10. When John indicates a transition either geographically or in time he usually says something like "after these things," "after this," "on the next day," or "as Jesus passed by." Here the words of Jesus flow on immediately after his comments about the Pharisees at the end of chapter 9 and therefore are related to them. This does not mean that they were necessarily spoken on the same occasion. They may have been spoken later; in fact, they probably were. But it

does mean that Jesus had the incident of the blind man in view as he told the parable.

As soon as we recognize this, we recognize that the thieves and robbers must refer to the false shepherds of Israel (the Pharisees) and that the sheepfold represents Judaism. The ones who hear Christ's voice and respond to his call are those of his own who are within Israel, of whom the man born blind is an example.

This understanding of the parable is further encouraged when we recognize the particular aspect of the shepherd imagery upon which Jesus is playing in these first verses—which, by the way, is not the same as that used later. In this chapter there are two kinds of sheepfolds. The first kind of sheepfold was that found in the countryside. It was nothing more than a circle of rocks into which the sheep could be driven. There was no door, just an opening across which the shepherd would place his body. This is the kind of sheepfold that Jesus is thinking about when he says, "I am the gate for the sheep, "just a verse or so later. The other kind of sheepfold was more substantial. This kind was found in the towns and villages and consisted of a room or enclosure with a regular gate or door. Into such an enclosure many shepherds together would drive their flocks when they returned to the village at night, and at such a place at night the sheep would be in the care of a porter. In the morning each shepherd would come to the fold, call his sheep by name —they, incidentally, literally knew his voice and would respond to his call—and then lead his own sheep out to pasture. This is the kind of sheepfold about which Christ is thinking in this parable.

What is the sheepfold then? It is not heaven, for thieves and robbers do not climb up into heaven. It is not the church, for the shepherd does not lead his flock out of that, as he does here. The sheepfold is Judaism, as we have already been led to suspect from the context of chapter 9; and the point is that Jesus presented himself to Judaism in order to call out from that body those whom God had given him. Later he says that he will soon call out sheep from other folds that there might be one great flock, the church, and one shepherd (v. 16). The porter—if we must

identify him—is God, or God's Holy Spirit, who opens to Christ and releases the sheep to Christ's call.

The Shepherd and His Sheep

Having understood the parable of the sheepfold, sheep, porter, and thieves, we can now reflect upon it for what it teaches spiritually. What are the lessons of this parable?

First, the parable teaches that *the Lord Jesus Christ knows his sheep* and that it is a wonderful thing to be known by him. This truth is implied in verse 3 ("he calls his own sheep by name"). It is stated even more explicitly in verse 14 ("I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and they know me"). Moreover, according to the further teaching of this chapter, the sheep are known to Christ because they have been given to him by the Father (v. 29), and it is for these and not for all sheep that the shepherd dies (vv. 14-15). What a wonderful collection of truths this is! God has given a certain number of individuals to Christ. Jesus knows who they are. And he dies for them in order that the way to heaven might be provided for them and that they might be safe.

Have you ever noticed that all this is done on behalf of God's chosen ones, even though God knows they are sinners and do not deserve it? Jesus not only knows us; he knows us as we are, and yet he died for us. Here Paul's words in Romans throw light on Christ's teaching. In the wonderful section of Romans 5 in which Paul writes of the results of our justification, there is a parenthetical statement saying that Christ died for us even though we were sinners: "When we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6-8). These verses are intended to help us to get our minds off ourselves and instead to rest in Christ's love.

While we were sinners, Christ died for us. That is a great truth; for if it were otherwise—if Christ did not know us or does not now know that

we are sinners—we might fear that some fresh revelation of sin in us might discourage him and weaken his love. "As it is," says Bishop Brooke Foss Westcott, "nothing in his flock is hidden from him: their weaknesses, their failures, their temptations, their sins, the good which they have neglected when it was within reach, the evil which they have pursued when it lay afar. All is open before his eyes. He knows them ... and he loves them still."

Second, the parable teaches us that having known them, *Jesus calls his sheep* and that he does so by name (v. 3). This is the doctrine of election, which is so prominent in John's Gospel. It is not liked. It is not often preached. But it is in Scripture and must be preached, above all by anyone who is serious about expounding this Gospel. For what is the central point of Christ's parable? Election! That is the point. It is that God has given some sheep to the Lord Jesus and that Jesus comes to the door of the sheepfold and, knowing his sheep in advance, calls to them and leads them out. Not all people are saved. Jesus did not call the Pharisees. But all those are saved whom God has given to Jesus. Indeed, these shall never perish, never be taken from Jesus (v. 28).

This is not an impersonal, still less an arbitrary decree, however, though some have charged this. It is a very tender and personal thing, for Jesus says that the shepherd calls his own sheep *by name*. Being called by name, they follow him. In his commentary Arthur W. Pink points out a number of illustrations throughout the Gospels. "'And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom; and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him' (Matt. 9:9). Here was a lone sheep of Christ. The Shepherd called him; he recognized His voice, and promptly *followed* Him.

"'And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house' (Luke 19:5). Here was one of the sheep, called *by name.* The response was prompt, for we are told, 'And he made haste, *and came down*, and received him joyfully' (v. 6).

"'The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me' (John 1:43). This shows us the Shepherd *seeking* His sheep before He called him. "John 11 supplies us with a still more striking example of the drawing power of the Shepherd's voice as He calleth His own sheep. There we read of Lazarus, in the grave; but when Christ calls His sheep *by name* —'Lazarus, come forth'—the sheep at once responded.

"As a touching example of the sheep *knowing* His voice we refer ... to John 20. Mary Magdalene visited the Saviour's sepulchre in the early morning hour. She finds the stone rolled away, and the body of the Lord gone. Disconsolate, she stands there weeping. Suddenly she sees the Lord Jesus standing by her, and 'knew not that it was Jesus.' He speaks to her, but she supposed Him to be the gardener. A moment later she identified Him, and says, 'Rabboni.' What had happened in the interval? What enabled her to identify Him? Just one word from him—'Mary'! The moment He *called His sheep by name* she *knew* his voice!"

This is the way it has always been, and it is how the call comes today. It is how he calls you. He knows you, of course, as we have seen. He knows you with all your failures and sin. But he also knows what he is going to make of you. As Paul writes, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified" (Rom. 8:29-30). This is what he intends to do—make you like himself, glorify you. For this end you are called. Mary! John! Peter! Susan! James! Do you hear his call? It is a wonderful thing to be known personally by the great God of the universe, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, the parable teaches us that having known his own sheep and having called them, *the Lord Jesus Christ leads them out* (v. 3). To what does he lead them? To his own great flock, the church, and into green pastures. From what does he lead them? The answer is from anything that would keep them from his pasture. We have already seen

one example in this story. Jesus led the man who had been born blind out of Judaism. But there are other examples. Later he will speak of other sheep and other folds, and he will state his intention to lead those sheep out of those lesser allegiances. The lesser allegiances can be many things. Jesus had led some out of paganism. He has led others out of western materialism. He has led some out of communism, some out of the worship of knowledge, some out of the rat race generated by our competitive society. These are our sheepfolds, whatever they may be, and it is from these that Christ calls us. Perhaps he is calling you from some lesser allegiance at this moment.

Hearing the Call

The story tells us that when Jesus told this parable the first time "they did not understand what he was telling them" (v. 6). But you have no reason not to understand. Moreover, if you are hearing Christ's call, you should respond to him quickly. To hear Christ's call is not the same thing as responding to emotional pressure in an evangelistic service. It is not the same as agreeing to become a member of a church. It is not agreeing to do anything. It is hearing, hearing Christ deep within your own spirit and personality. I will tell you what it is like. It is, above all, arriving at the conviction that what the Bible says regarding your need and the love of the Lord Jesus in answer to that need is true and that you should respond to it.

Have you been sensing that? Have you been saying, "Yes, what I am hearing is true. I have been waiting all my life for this. This is that for which I have been made"? If you have, do not make the mistake of being slow to answer Christ's call. Respond immediately, as Zacchaeus did and many millions of others have done, and follow Jesus. He is the Great Shepherd. Those who follow him do not want for any good thing.

Chapter 122.
"I Am the Gate"

John 10:7-9

The parable of the Good Shepherd is familiar and generally understood because it has been told so many times. But when the parable was spoken the first time, it was not understood. Thus, in developing the image, Christ changed it slightly, this time speaking of a second kind of sheep pen and of himself as the gate of the sheep rather than as the shepherd. This development throws more light on Christ's parable and prepares for the explicit identification of Jesus as the Good Shepherd (John 10:7-9).

A Rustic Sheep Pen

In our last study, as we began to talk about the ways of keeping sheep in Christ's day, we saw that there were two kinds of sheep pen. The first is the kind in view in the opening verses of this chapter. This kind of sheep pen was in the cities and villages. It was fairly large, large enough to hold several flocks of sheep at any rate, and it was public. Moreover, it was fairly substantial. A sheep pen like this was in the care of a porter, whose duty it was to guard the gate during the night and to admit the shepherds in the morning. The shepherds would call their sheep, each of whom knew his own shepherd's voice, and would lead them out to pasture. We saw from the context of this parable that by it Jesus was referring to his role in calling his own sheep out of Judaism.

The second kind of sheep pen was not public, nor was it in the villages. This sheep pen was in the countryside, where the shepherds would keep their flocks in good weather. Presumably this is where the shepherds were keeping their sheep at the time of Christ's birth when the angels appeared to them and invited them to Bethlehem. This type of sheep pen was nothing more than a rough circle of rocks piled into a wall with a small open space, a gate, through which the shepherd would drive the sheep at nightfall. Since there was no gate to close—just an opening—the shepherd would keep the sheep in and wild animals out by lying across the opening. He would sleep there, in this case literally becoming the gate. Clearly, this is the kind of sheep pen about which Jesus is speaking in the further development of the parable.

"I am the gate for the sheep." In this section Jesus is the gate. He speaks of leading his flock in rather than of leading them out. He talks about the church itself rather than about calling the church out of Judaism. In other words, he is dealing now with a particular body of people committed to his care and he is revealing the relationship in which he stands to them.

Only One Gate

What does this image teach us about Christianity then? What does the gate teach us about Jesus Christ? First, it obviously teaches that there is only one gate, meaning that Jesus is the sole way to God. This point is evident from the nature of the sheep pen that Christ had in view—if it had more than one gate, it would have been useless—and it is reinforced from many of Christ's other sayings. Thus, to give but one example, Christ says in the fourteenth chapter, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (v. 6).

This is crucial for Christianity. It is not so for other religions. It would make little difference to most of the world's religions if their founder were someone else, or even if they had no founder at all; for essentially they are collections of spiritual truths (or claims to truth) and methods, all of which could exist without their founder. They needed someone to discover them, of course. But the point is that anyone could have discovered them and that once they were discovered they existed in their own right much like scientific propositions. Besides, if they became lost, they could be rediscovered. This is the nature of the world's religions. Christianity is not in this category. Nor is Jesus like these other religious figures. Jesus did not claim merely to know the truth; he said that he is the truth. He did not merely show the way to God; he said that he is the way. Therefore, within Christianity, if there is no Christ, there is no way to God, no truth about God, and no vitality.

How could Jesus make such claims? If he were only a man, they are preposterous, of course. On the other hand, if he is who he said he is and if he did what he said he would do, they make sense. Jesus claimed to be God and to have come to earth to die for our sin. We deserve to

die for our own sin, both physically and spiritually. We deserve to be separated from God. But Jesus died in our place. He who was sinless accepted the guilt of our sin and died for us. No one else could do it, but he could and did. Thus, he literally became the gate by which sinful people can approach God the Father. The author of the Book of Hebrews called him "a new and living way" (10:20). Paul wrote, "through him we ... have access ... to the Father" (Eph. 2:18).

We must admit at this point that the claim of Jesus Christ to be the gate is a contested claim, contested by those whom he terms "thieves and robbers." Yet, as Christians believe, it is a claim that can stand up to scrutiny.

There are two kinds of such men, and Jesus uses two different words to describe them. The first word is *kleptēs*, from which we get our word *kleptomaniac*. It refers to one who steals cunningly or by stealth. The other word is *lēstēs*, for which we have no English derivative. It refers to one who steals by violence. Thus, if we may imagine the first word to refer to someone who carries off department store merchandise under a coat, the second would refer to those who might use guns to rob a bank.

In the religious world both types are prominent. The first type uses cunning, as Satan did in his approach to Eve in the Garden—"Did God really say... ?" (Gen. 3:1). In this category are all who raise doubts in the minds of others—unbelieving ministers, Sunday school teachers, and professors of theology. By their questions they turn the minds of their learners away from Christ and instead cause them to rely upon the supposed wisdom of the teacher. These are those whom Paul terms "treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power." He advises, "Have nothing to do with them" (2 Tim. 3:4-5). The other type is violent, for he thrusts himself into a place of authority in the church and demands that others follow him. The Bible terms this ecclesiastical tyranny the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which God hates (Rev. 2:15).

There is only one gate, according to Christ's image; and Christ himself is the gate. Many have found this claim to be valid and have been

willing to be sheep in his pasture.

For Any Man

The first lesson of the image, then, is an exclusive one—there is only one door. But there is a second lesson that is correspondingly broad. It is that anyone may enter it. Jesus indicates this in verse 9: "whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture."

This verse has sometimes been taken in a way that contradicts John 6:44, which says: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." But those who dislike John 6:44 either completely disregard it or else try to use our text to overturn its plain meaning. Actually the two verses are not in conflict. John 6:44 looks at the matter from the Godward side and declares, rightly, that no man ever made the first move toward God. Men come to God only because God draws them. On the other hand, as our text from John 10 shows, God does not respect persons; therefore, any man, regardless of who he is or where he comes from, may be among that number. Let me put it this way: the call of God is not restricted by anything we can imagine. It is not restricted on the basis of race, education, social position, wealth, achievements, good deeds, or anything else. Therefore, there is no reason why you (whoever you are) should not be among the number of those whom God draws to Jesus.

Do you hesitate to believe that? If so, look at the state of the man who had been blind and for whose sake the parable of the Good Shepherd was told. He had nothing; he was a beggar. He was nothing; no one would have paid attention to him for more than a moment, and then normally only to push him out of the way. Yet this man, despised by every one else, was saved by Jesus. Certainly, if this beggar could have entered in, then any one can. You can. So can others.

You Must Enter

But you must enter in; this is the third lesson that Christ's image teaches. To enter, in this verse, is the same thing as to "eat" of Jesus, "drink" of Jesus, or "come" to Jesus, all of which we have looked at earlier. It means to believe on him or trust him and do this personally.

I am sure that this is precisely why Jesus calls himself "the gate for the sheep." As the phrase stands it is a bit peculiar. We might say, "the door through which the sheep enter" or "the door to the sheep." But "the gate for the sheep"—well, that is just not good English idiom. If we change this into another form, however, then I believe we can understand it. We can understand it if we say "the sheep's door." What is the difference? Only that this particular form of the phrase makes the door personal. It makes clear that we are not talking about an abstract principle or concept. We are not trusting an object. We trust a person, Jesus Christ. And, because Jesus gave himself for us by dying for our sin, we find that he becomes ours through our believing on him, just as surely as we have become his by the same act.

Have you believed on him? It is not hard. There is no complicated course to follow. If Jesus had compared himself to a wall we should have to climb over, it might be hard work. If he had compared himself to a long, dark passageway, we should have to feel along it; some might be afraid to try. But he is not a wall or a passageway. He is a gate, and a gate can be entered easily and instantly.

Let me demonstrate how instantly by this story. A number of years ago a woman sat in a pew in the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, which I now serve as pastor. At the time, the pastor was Donald Grey Barnhouse. He was talking about the cross and of the need to believe on the Christ who died upon it. The woman I am talking about was not a Christian. She had been raised in a religious home and had heard about Jesus. She had heard about the cross. But she did not understand these things and therefore obviously had never actually trusted in Jesus for her salvation. In order to make clear that for salvation only belief in Jesus Christ is necessary Barnhouse said, "Imagine that the cross has a door in it. All you are asked to do is to go through. On one side, the side facing you, there is written an invitation: 'Whosoever will, may come.'

You stand there with your sin upon you and wonder if you should enter or not. Finally you do, and as you do the burden of your sin drops away. You are safe and free. Joyfully you then turn around and see written on the backside of the cross, through which you have now entered, the words 'Chosen in him before the foundation of the world.'" Barnhouse then invited those who were listening to enter.

The woman later said that this was the first time in her life that she had really understood what it meant to be a Christian and that in understanding it, she had believed. She believed right there— in that church at that moment. She entered the door. Moreover, the rest of her life bore witness to the fact that a great change had occurred and that she was God's child. I am certain of the facts of this story because that woman was my mother.

Three Benefits

Finally, I want you to see that these verses also speak of three great benefits of entering into God's flock through Christ. They are consequences of belief in one sense. In another sense they are inducements to come. Each begins with an "s," so I know you can remember them.

First, Jesus says that anyone who enters in will be *saved.* This promise is not the limited promise that we sometimes make it out to be. That is, it is not purely future, as if Jesus were offering a "pie in the sky by and by" salvation. Salvation is partially future; that belongs to it. But it is also past and present. It affects who we are and what happens to us from beginning to end. A better way of talking about it is in terms of sin's penalty, power, and presence. By entering in through Christ we immediately escape sin's penalty, so that we need not fear our sins will ever rise up against us. This is justification. Then, too, we also enter into a life in which we are increasingly delivered from sin's power. The Bible calls this sanctification. Finally, we look forward to a day marked by the return of Christ or else our passing into his presence through

death, in which even the presence of sin will be gone and our salvation will be perfected. The Bible calls this glorification.

Second, Jesus promises that anyone who enters in will be *safe*. This is the point of his reference to going "in and out." If we did not know better from other references and from a knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic idiom, we might think that this referred to entering and leaving the church or to salvation itself. But this is not what Christ means. To be able to go in and out means security (cf. Deut. 28:6; 1 Kings 3:7; Ps. 121:8), for in Christ's day when a man could go in or out without fear it meant that his country was at peace and that the ruler had the affairs of the nation under control. When danger threatened, the people were shut up in the cities under siege. Thus, Jesus promises safety for those who trust him.

Third, he also promised that they would be *satisfied*—saved, safe, and satisfied—for he said that they would be able to go in and out and "find pasture." Palestine is a barren land for the most part, and good pasture was not easy to find. Consequently, to be assured of good pasture was a wonderful thing. It spoke of prosperity and contentment, of health and happiness. It was in this sense that David wrote of the care of his Good Shepherd: "He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul" (Ps. 23:2-3). It was this that Paul wrote of when he told the Philippians, "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (4:19). This last verse does not speak of all our desires, of course. We often desire that which is wrong or is not good for us. It speaks only of our needs, but even in that form it is a great promise. It is the promise that the one who enters in by Christ will not lack any good thing.

God Provides

Finally, let me indicate one more verse by way of conclusion. It comes from the Old Testament, from a passage in which Moses is asking God to raise up a leader for the people. Moses is about to die, and he wants God to provide a person to succeed him. "Moses said to the Lord, 'May the Lord, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this

community who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd'" (Num. 27:15-17). In the context of this book God answers the prayer of Moses by choosing Joshua, who then goes on to lead the people in the conquest of the Promised Land. But in the longer view God answered that prayer through the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Great Shepherd, our Savior. He leads us in, and he leads us out. Under his care we find pasture.

Chapter 123.
Life, More Life

John 10:10

I am pausing in our study of the tenth chapter of John's Gospel to give particular attention to verse 10; for it contains an idea that has become popular in some Christian circles, and it is important that we understand it. The idea is that of the abundant life. Verse 10 suggests it: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

What is the full or abundant life? It is not necessarily a long life, although there are verses that promise a long life to some, such as to those who honor their father and mother (Exod. 20:12; cf. Eph. 6:2-3). It is not necessarily a life free from sorrow or sickness either, although God certainly does spare us many sorrows that we might otherwise have and often preserves us from sickness. It is not a life of sickly piety, where everything is "beautiful" or "precious" or "just wonderful." The abundant life, as Scripture sneaks of it, is, above all, the contented life, in which contentment comes from the confidence that God is equal to every emergency and does indeed supply all our genuine needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

The contented life is the life of the sheep who finds himself in the hands of a good shepherd. There may be dangers; in fact, there *will* be

dangers. There may be storms at times, even drought and famine. Still, in the hands of a good shepherd the sheep is content and life is bountiful.

Abundance

Contentment means satisfaction, and satisfaction means to have enough. This understanding is reinforced by the meaning of "abundance" in English and in most ancient languages.

Our English word "abundance" comes from the two Latin words *ab* and *undare* which mean "to rise in waves" or "to overflow." The first translation gives a picture of the unceasing rise of the waves upon a seashore. There the waves rise again and again. One wave surges forward and exhausts its force on the sand, but another follows and another and another. Thus it will continue as long as time lasts. The other picture is of a flood. This makes us think of a river fed by heavy rains, rising irresistibly until it overflows its banks. The abundant life is, therefore, one in which we are content in the knowledge that God's grace is more than sufficient for our needs, that nothing can suppress it, and that God's favor toward us is unending.

The Greek word for "abundance," *perissos*, has a mathematical meaning and generally denotes a surplus. In this sense it is used of the twelve baskets of food that remained after Christ's feeding of the five thousand, as related in Matthew's Gospel (14:20). It is translated "remains." The comparative is used to say that John the Baptist excelled the Old Testament prophets in dignity and importance (Matt. 11:9) and that love is more important than all sacrifices (Mark 12:33).

Made Alive

Before one can know the abundant life, he must first know life. That is, he must first be made alive through faith in Christ. Christ is speaking of this when he says, "I have come that they may have life." It is only after this that he adds, "and have it to the full."

Are you aware that you have been made alive spiritually? You should be just as certain of this as you are that you have been made alive physically. In fact, one whole book of the Bible has been written so that Christians (who have been made alive through the new birth) might be certain of it and might grow in Christ on the basis of that assurance. The book is 1 John, and John tells us that this is his purpose in writing. He says, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). A few verses earlier he tells us that God has given life to all who believe on Jesus as God's Son and that they can be assured of this because God himself tells them that this is what he has done.

The Twenty-third Psalm

This brings us to the abundant life itself, and in order to discuss it in its fullest biblical framework I want to take you to the Twenty-third Psalm. This psalm is, above all, the psalm of the contented life. When it begins by saying "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want" this is precisely what it is talking about. Not to be in want is to be content, and this state can exist only when the sheep is in the care of a good shepherd. In the psalm David tells us that he is content in the Lord in reference to five things.

First, he does not lack rest. He indicates this by saying, "He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul."

In the small but very rewarding book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23,* author Phillip Keller, who was himself a shepherd, tells of the difficulty there is in getting a sheep to lie down. Sheep do not easily lie down, he says. In fact, "It is almost impossible for them to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met. Owing to their timidity they refuse to lie down unless they are free of all fear. Because of the social behavior within a flock sheep will not lie down unless they are free from friction with others of their kind. If tormented by flies or parasites, sheep will not lie down. ...Lastly, sheep will not lie down as long as they feel in need of finding food. They must be free from hunger." Freedom from

fear, tension, aggravation, and hunger! These are the four necessities. And the important thing, as Keller points out, is that it is only the shepherd himself who can provide them.

This is an interesting picture. For when the psalm begins with the sheep at rest it begins with a picture of sheep who have found their shepherd to be a good shepherd, that is, one who is able to meet their physical needs and to provide them with release from anxiety. Moreover, it is interesting that it begins at this point. For the other advantages of the contented life—guidance, comfort, safety, provision, and a destiny—come only to one who has found the Lord adequate to his every need.

Guidance

Second, the psalmist tells us that he does not lack guidance. For "he leads me beside quiet waters" and "he guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

Sheep are stupid creatures. In fact, they are probably the most stupid animals on earth. One aspect of their stupidity is seen in the fact that they so easily wander away. They can have a good shepherd who has brought them to the best grazing lands, near an abundant supply of water— still they will wander away over a hill to where the fields are barren and the water undrinkable. Or again, they are creatures of habit. They can have found good grazing land due to the diligence of the shepherd; but then having found it, they will continue to graze upon it until every blade of grass and even every root is eaten, the fields ruined, and themselves impoverished. This has actually happened to sheep and the land they graze on in many parts of the world—Spain, Greece, Mesopotamia, North Africa, parts of the western United States, and New Zealand.

No other class of livestock requires more careful handling and more detailed directions than do sheep. Therefore, a shepherd who is able to give good guidance is essential for their welfare. He will move the sheep from field to field (before deterioration sets in) and will always stay near water. He will chase strays. He will plan the grazing to fit the

seasons of the year. In the same way, we too need the Good Shepherd. We do not lack guidance if we will but have it.

Safety

Third, David tells us that he does not lack safety, even in the presence of great danger. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

This verse often has been taken as providing words of comfort for those who are dying; and it is not wrongly used in that way. God certainly is a source of comfort in death. Primarily, however, the verse speaks of the shepherd's ability to protect the sheep in moments of danger. The picture in this verse is of the passage from the lowlands, where sheep spend the winter, through the valleys to the high pastures where they go in summer. The valleys are the places of richest pasture and of abundant water. But they also are places of danger. Wild animals lurk in the broken canyon walls to either side. Sudden storms may sweep down the valleys. There may be floods. The sun does not shine so well into the valleys. So there really is shadow, which at any moment might become death's shadow. It is through such experiences that our Lord leads us in safety.

In the book that I referred to earlier, Keller notes how often Christians speak of their desire "to move on to higher ground with God," wanting to move above the lowlands of life and yet not realizing that mountaintop experiences are entered into only by passing through the valleys. Strong faith comes from having faith tested. Patience comes from having lived through tribulations. This means that life will not necessarily be smooth under the direction of our Shepherd. He will sometimes lead us through rough places. Nevertheless, as we go through them we can know of his ability to keep us from falling and to present us before the presence of his Father with great joy.

Keller writes: "The basic question is not whether we have many or few valleys. It is not whether those valleys are dark or merely dim with

shadows. The question is how do I react to them? How do I go through them? How do I cope with the calamities that come my way? With Christ I face them calmly. With His gracious Spirit to guide me I face them fearlessly. I know of a surety that only through them can I possibly travel on to higher ground with God." **Provision**

Fourth, Psalm 23 speaks of the shepherd's provision for each physical need of the flock. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."

Keller thinks that the reference to preparing the table refers to the shepherd's advance preparation of the high tablelands or mesas where the sheep graze in summer. If so, it refers to the elimination of hazards, the destruction of poisonous plants, and the driving away of predators—all before the sheep arrive. If it does not refer to this, it must be taken merely of God's provision of peace and feeding even when enemies lurk nearby. In such a time, says David, God anoints him with oil and fills his cup of wine to overflowing.

In biblical imagery oil and wine speak of joy and prosperity; for the growing of olives and grapes and their transformation into oil and wine take time and gentle care. In times of domestic turmoil or war these tasks were forgotten.

Moreover, oil and wine well suited the inhabitants of a dry and barren land and were therefore highly valued. In Palestine, where the sun shines fiercely most of the year and the temperature continually soars up into the hundreds, the skin quickly becomes cracked and broken, and throats become dusty and parched. Oil soothes the skin, particularly the face. Wine clears the throat. Therefore, when a guest arrived at the home of a friend in Palestine in Christ's or David's day, hospitality demanded the provision of oil and wine so that the ravages of travel might be overcome and friends might make merry in each other's company. David spoke of this elsewhere when he prayed, "O LORD ...let your face shine on your servant" (Ps. 31:14, 16). A shining face was the face of a friend. In another passage he thanks God for "wine

that gladdens the heart of man, [and] oil to make his face shine" (Ps. 104:15).

David knew of God's great love and provision; his face shone, and his heart was made merry because of it. Oh for the shining face and the merry heart today! Far too many have scowling faces and gloomy hearts, but that is not what God intends for his children. Instead, if we will allow him to lead us to the high pastures of the Christian life we will find our table prepared, our heads anointed with purest oil, and our cups overflowing with the wine of joy.

A Heavenly Home

Finally, having spoken of all these provisions, David adds no less gladly that he does not lack for a heavenly home. He is blessed in this life, but it is not in this life only that he knows God's goodness. He will know it forever. Thus he declares, "Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Ps. 23:6).

To have a sure home is one of the great desires of the nomadic people who have generally occupied that area of the Near East bordered by the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, and the great Arabian desert. T. E. Lawrence, who gained fame as Lawrence of Arabia during World War I, has written of this eloquently in his classic *Seven Pillars of Wisdom.* He tells in the opening pages of that book how, because of the geography of this area, one tribe after another came out of the desert to fight for the lush Judean highlands, which contained the best trees, crops, and pastures. The Israelites in their conquest of Palestine under Joshua were just one of these peoples. When one group (like the Israelites) succeeded, the conquered people generally moved just a bit south into the Negev (which was also good land but not quite as good as that to the north) and displaced others. Those who were displaced in turn displaced others, and those displaced still others, with the result that there was always a constant movement around the entire area. The last of the peoples would be forced back into the desert with nothing before them but Damascus. At some point all the peoples of the Near

East had this background. So, for most of them, Damascus with its ample rivers and fields became the symbol of true abundance at the end of life's pilgrimage. It symbolized home.

For us who know the Good Shepherd there is also a similar longing; but the longing is not for
Damascus or any other earthly home. Our longing is for that great and final home that the Lord Jesus Christ has himself gone to prepare for us. He has said, "I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:2-3). With such a promise we know that we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Of our state in that home John the evangelist later wrote in the Book of Revelation: "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 7:16-17).

The blessings of this life and heaven too! Nor can we forget that this was achieved for us by One who himself became a lamb in order to die for us so that we might be able to enter into the fullness of such a great salvation.

Chapter 124.
"I Am the Good Shepherd"

John 10:11-18

The claim of the Lord Jesus Christ to be "the good shepherd" is the fourth of the "I am" sayings in John's Gospel. But if we were to order these sayings in terms of their popularity, I am sure that "I am the good shepherd" would be number one. It is not that we understand it so completely, for there is certainly much about shepherds and their care of sheep in Christ's time that we do not know. It is rather that there is so

much in Christ's saying that our hearts know intuitively and for which Jesus is loved.

The Good Shepherd For one thing, Jesus claimed to be the "good" Shepherd. And we know by comparison with other people—particularly with those who are in positions of responsibility, whether parents, pastors, or politicians—that he is uniquely good. That is, he is good in a way that they are not. The word "good" is itself interesting, and we sense its meaning even though we may never have heard of the Greek word it translates or what the Greek signifies. The word means "good" in the sense of being morally good; but it also means "beautiful," "winsome," "lovely," "attractive," or even "possessing all and whatever qualities make the object described a good thing or the person a good person." Moreover, if we compare Christ's "I am the good shepherd" with his parallel claims to be "the true bread" or "the true vine," we also see that the word means "genuine" or "true," as opposed to "false" or "artificial." But we all sense this; that is my point. At least, it is my point as regards all Christians. We sense that by this phrase we are to recognize Jesus as the good, beautiful, winsome, lovely, attractive, true, and genuine Shepherd.

Moreover, we understand that he is claiming to be that exclusively. For he is not *a* good shepherd, as though he were one of many in that class. He is *the* Good Shepherd. There have been other shepherds, of course. The Old Testament speaks of both good and bad shepherds of Israel. The New Testament speaks of shepherds for our day; for Jesus is termed the "Chief Shepherd" from whom the leaders of God's people, the undershepherds, have assigned responsibilities (1 Peter 5:4). But compared to Jesus, we who are shepherds in the lesser sense scarcely seem to be that at all. For who of us could call ourselves "a *good* shepherd," much less "*the* good shepherd." Yet we instantly confess that he is both and love him for it.

Why does he call himself the Good Shepherd? Or, to put it in other language, what is he like or what has he done that he should bear this tide? The verses of John 10 answer the question in two parts. First, Jesus is the Good Shepherd because he lays down his life for the sheep.

We find that in verse 11. Second, Jesus is the Good Shepherd because he knows his sheep and directs them properly. We find that in verse 14. In both of these aspects Jesus is above all other men or women.

His Death, No Tragedy

I am amazed at the amount of teaching about the death of Jesus that we find in verse 11, and the more so because the teaching is more or less incidental to Christ's statement. The point Jesus is making is that he can be called the Good Shepherd primarily because he gives his life for the sheep. This is obvious, first, because he repeats it four times—in verses 11, 15, 17, and 18—but also because it is emphasized in contrast to the hired hand who runs away when danger threatens. The good shepherd is the one who sticks by his sheep, who defends them, and who will even die for them if necessary. This is the main point. What is amazing is the amount of teaching about Christ's death that occurs over and beyond this.

First, we are led to see that the death about which Jesus speaks is *voluntary.* This is evident in two places: in verse 11, which says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep," and in verses 17 and 18, which add, "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."

We must never think, in contemplating the death of Christ, that this death was somehow an accident or, even worse, a tragedy. It may or may not have been a tragedy when Alexander the Great fell sick and died at an extremely young age, or when Keats died in his early twenties. But it was most certainly not a tragedy when Jesus died at approximately thirty-three years of age. This was no accident. This was and is the great turning point of history. It was planned before the foundation of the world, for Peter spoke of Christ, saying, "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (Acts 2:23). It was this for which Christ was born, for the

angel told Joseph, "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). It was this toward which Jesus' life consciously and deliberately moved, as these and many other sayings of the Lord indicate. Jesus did not have to come to this earth, any more than a man has to be a shepherd. He did not have to die. Nevertheless, he both came and died voluntarily for our salvation.

Second, we are told that his death was *vicarious;* that is, Jesus died not for his own sin—he had none—but for ours and in our place. He indicates this by saying, "The good shepherd gives his life *for the sheep."*

I cannot understand why so many have been urged to deny this. The words are plain enough, both here and elsewhere. They tell us that Jesus died, not only *for* others in the sense of "on their behalf," but and even stronger than this, in the sense of "in their place." The Greek preposition is *hyper*, the sense of which is given beyond any doubt in Romans 5:6-8, where the same phrases occur: "When we were still powerless Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man some might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died *for* us." The meaning is this: We are sinners; as sinners we deserve to die (both physically and spiritually); but Christ willingly died in our place, taking our punishment, so that we might be set free from sin and its penalty to serve God.

Third, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ was *specific;* that is, he died for a specified number of people designated in this verse as his sheep. We do not know who these sheep are, of course, and I am glad that we do not. If we could, we would be constantly prying into other persons' lives to see whether or not the other one is chosen; and in that case we would be little better than spiritual peeping toms. It is not for us to know. We cannot know. If we had lived in Sodom, would we have judged Lot, Abraham's nephew, to be a saved man? Probably not! Yet the New Testament tells us that he was accounted righteous in the sight of God, though he undoubtedly erred greatly in going to Sodom (2 Peter 2:7). Would we have considered Judas to be saved? Probably yes, in his

case. But Jesus told us explicitly that he was a tool of Satan (John 6:70-71).

We cannot know precisely who these are for whom Christ died. But Jesus does know them and died for them. The result of this is that he literally paid the penalty for their sins and theirs only, with the further result that they are now fully justified in the sight of the Holy God and can stand boldly before him.

Finally, we are told the cause of the Shepherd's death for the sheep. It is because he cares for them (v. 13) or, as we should more properly say, because *he loves them.*

"What? Love sheep? Do you mean to say that you really love sheep, Jesus, and that you love them enough to die for them?"

"Yes, that is right," says Jesus. "I really do love them."

"But they are just sheep, and sinful sheep at that! We would understand if you should say that you felt pity for them, that you hated or were even grieved to see them torn by wild animals or scattered. But surely you would not go so far as to give your life for these poor silly creatures? Your love cannot be as great or as strong as that?"

"But it is," says Jesus. "I do love them. I love you."

"Me? Me, with all my sin?"

"Yes," says Jesus. "You are the one. I love you. I died for you. I want you to become a happy and useful sheep in my flock."

I do not know about you, but I cannot understand such love. I cannot fathom it. I cannot trace the reasonings of such love. But I do believe it and respond to it rejoicing. That is all we can do after all. David once wrote, "How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?" He answered, "I will lift up the cup of salvation [that is, I will believe God concerning his offer of salvation] and call on the name of the LORD

[that is, I will praise him for it]" (Ps. 116:12-13). And so we do, knowing that ours is the loveliest, most glorious song of the universe.

> Awake, my soul, in joyful lays,
> And sing thy great Redeemer's praise: He justly claims a song from me, His loving-kindness is so free.
> He saw me ruined in the fall,
> Yet loved me notwithstanding all,
> And saved me from my lost estate, His loving-kindness is so great.

Foolish men may be ashamed of such a song and of such great love. But Jesus is not ashamed of it. It is rather his boast and glory: "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." God forbid, then, that we should glory save in that which is his glory, even the cross "through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14).

Knowing and Known

In the second place, Jesus is the Good Shepherd because he knows the sheep and is known by them. There is comfort in that.

Why is that comforting? It is comforting because we long to be known and know others, and yet are basically incapable of it. It is true that there is a certain amount of knowledge of one another between human beings. Friends know one another. Parents know their children, children their parents. There is often a special and beautiful knowledge between husband and wife. But in spite of these things, for each of us deep in our hearts there is a hunger to be known better, to be known for what we really are, and to share a corresponding and similar knowledge of another. It exists on the human level. It exists above all on the divine level. For though we are sinners and in rebellion there is, nevertheless, a

certain emptiness or hunger to know God and be known of God. Augustine called it restlessness, adding, "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

Moreover, there is comfort in the claim that Jesus knows his sheep because it is precisely as "his sheep" that he knows them. In other words, to be known of him is at the same time to be a member of his flock and thereby to be one for whom he died and who, as he says later, will never be snatched from his hand. This is a permanent relationship, then, and a personal one. I am his sheep? Yes, forever! Then he is my Shepherd, and that is forever too.

Finally, there is comfort in the fact that Jesus knows his sheep. I therefore need not fear that something about me might suddenly rise up to startle him and diminish his love.

There is a wonderful illustration of this point in the nature of sheep themselves. It is because of it, no doubt, that we find the image of the sheep and the shepherd so apt. Think of the characteristics of sheep. For one thing, they are all *different.* In our time, we are so oriented to mass-produced products and, even in ranching, to such large herds that we seldom think of differences. To us a sheep is a sheep, a cow is a cow, a dog is a dog ... yes, even a person is a person. But sheep are different from each other, people are different from each other; and the Good Shepherd recognizes those differences. In fact, it is by their differences that he knows them. If they were all alike, they would be indistinguishable.

I sometimes think that half our problems in the Christian church come from our trying to be exactly like another person, or from other people trying to make us be like them. Sheep are different. Jesus made them different and knows that they are different. So, be yourself, and strive to become all that Jesus wants you personally to be.

Not only are sheep different, they also are *helpless.* Jesus knows they are helpless, and that is why he has become our Good Shepherd. Did you know, for instance, that a sheep will often get stuck on its back like a turtle, so that it is unable to move, and that in warm weather it can die

in that position within a few hours? A sheep in that position is called a "cast" sheep, and it must be rescued. Or again, did you know that a sheep is undiscriminating in its choice of food, so that it will eat anything, even poisonous roots and weeds? Or again, that a sheep is helpless in the face of predatory animals, so terrified, in fact, that it often will simply stand there without uttering a bleat until it is attacked and killed? I see myself in these characteristics, and as I do I am even more grateful for my Good Shepherd.

Jesus knows his sheep! Well, then, he also knows that they are *wayward.* A sheep can have perfect pasture, all that it needs or can ever need; yet, if there is so much as a tiny opening in an otherwise secure fence, somehow the sheep will find the opening, wriggle through, and wander away to less ample fields and into danger. I am like that, and so are you.

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it;
Prone to leave the God I love,

reads the hymn; and it is true. All we like sheep *have* gone astray yet in Jesus we have a Shepherd who is constantly on the alert to keep us from wandering and to seek us out when we succeed (as we often do) in going astray. Finally, a sheep is useful. Each year, under proper management, it produces a valuable crop of wool. Thus, when we are told that Jesus knows his sheep, we know that he knows that of us also and that he desires to have us be useful both to himself and to others. I know that he does not need us. He who created the heavens and earth and all that is in them does not need sheep for what they can give him. He does not need our good works. He does not need us to convert people, or even to sing his praises. He has angels to do that. But the fact is: he has created us; he has called us into his flock; and he has given us work to do. How, then, will we do it? Will we be useful or useless? Industrious or lazy? Our attitude should be, "Lord, what would you have me do?" To be willing is to express gratitude to the One who is indeed our Good Shepherd.

Chapter 125.
The Chief Shepherd

John 10:11-18

The parable of the Good Shepherd is a parable in which believers can learn about the Lord Jesus
Christ. But it is not only that. Like most passages of the Bible that tell us about the Lord Jesus Christ it also is one in which we can learn what *we* are to be as we are made like him. In other words, as Christ is the Good Shepherd, so, too, are we to be shepherds; and we are to find the standards for our shepherd work in his own.

The Bible points to this truth in an interesting way. Three times in the New Testament Jesus Christ is represented as the Shepherd, but in each case the word "shepherd" is preceded by a different adjective. In John

10, Jesus is called the *good* Shepherd, as we have seen—"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (v. 11). Here the emphasis is upon the voluntary and vicarious death of the Shepherd. In Hebrews 13:20-21 Jesus is called the *great* Shepherd —"May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." In this verse the emphasis is upon Christ's resurrection and therefore also upon his ability to work through and accomplish his purposes in his sheep. The third passage speaks of Jesus as the Chief Shepherd and stresses his second coming to reward those who have served him as undershepherds. It is 1 Peter 5:4—"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away."

These passages highlight the focal points of Christ's ministry. As the Good Shepherd, Christ dies for the sheep. As the Great Shepherd, Christ rises from the dead so he might serve the sheep. As the Chief Shepherd, Christ returns to reward those who have been faithful in the responsibilities to which they have been assigned as undershepherds. It is the last of these that highlights the point I am making.

When Jesus described himself as the Shepherd he revealed many important aspects of what he is to us, but at the same time he also revealed what we should be to others. For we are all shepherds—if we are believers in Christ. To a greater or lesser extent we have all been given an oversight of others. Do we exercise our responsibility as Jesus exercised it—in the family, in business, in the affairs of the church, in government, or in other areas? Do we show Christ's selfsacrifice and sympathy? Are we faithful? Whether we are or not, we may improve our service by reflecting on the characteristics of the Good Shepherd.

Found Faithful

The first and most obvious characteristic of the Good Shepherd is that he is faithful; that is, he is faithful in his responsibilities, not only when

the skies are sunny and the countryside is peaceful but also when times are hard and when danger threatens. This is apparent from Christ's contrast of himself to the hired hand who, unlike the Good Shepherd, "sees the wolf coming, ...abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it" (v. 12).

The hired hand is one who is doing a job primarily for what he can get out of it rather than out of a true sense of responsibility toward the sheep. So the question becomes: Am I a hired hand in relation to those for whom God has made me responsible? Am I faithful or faithless? Do I stay with the work? Or do I abandon it when I see the wolf coming?

Before we try to excuse our conduct in this area (and we do try to excuse it), we need to hear one other thing said about the hired hand. It is in the next verse: "The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep" (v. 13). At first reading this may seem trite, but it is not at all trite. It reflects a profound principle: a man does what he does because of what he is. Pink writes, "The drunkard drinks because he is a drunkard. But he is a drunkard *before* he drinks to excess. The liar lies because he is a liar; but he is a liar before he *tells* a lie. The thief steals because he is a thief. When the testing time comes each man reveals what he is by what he does. Conduct conforms to character as the stream does to the fountain." Therefore, before we try to excuse ourselves, let us learn that our conduct in testing proves what we are. Let us ask God for the character that proves faithful.

There is much in the Word of God about faithfulness. Jesus spoke of stewards who proved that they were faithful by the way they handled their master's goods (Matt. 24:45-46; 25:14-30; Luke 12:42-43; 19:11-27). Paul wrote, "It is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). He also encouraged Timothy to commit the gospel "to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2). He calls Onesimus a "faithful and dear brother" (Col. 4:9). Peter calls Silvanus "a faithful brother" (1 Peter 5:12). In Revelation, Antipas is called "my faithful witness" (Rev. 2:13). Faithfulness is of primary importance in Scripture. So whatever good

characteristics we may have, we will prove of little value to the work of Christ if we do not possess this primary and essential characteristic.

Hardworking

Second, we must be hardworking and diligent. Nothing worthwhile is done without hard work. Yet many Christians act as though they have been saved by Christ merely to be transported to heaven on "flowery beds of ease," as the hymn acknowledges. Our standard is to be that of the Good Shepherd who works hard for his sheep.

In our study of John 10:10 we had occasion to look at Psalm 23, which tells us that the one who has God for his Shepherd does not lack any good thing. Specifically, he does not lack rest, guidance, safety, provision, or a heavenly home. These provisions are worth reflecting on in themselves—we did reflect on them earlier—but they also lead us to ask: Why does the sheep of the psalm not lack them? The answer obviously is that the Shepherd provides them and that he does so through much diligence and hard work. The sheep does not lack rest because the Shepherd seeks out green pastures in which he may lie down. He does not lack guidance because "he leads me beside quiet waters" and because "he leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." He does not lack safety because the Shepherd defends him against natural disasters and wild animals. He does not lack provision because the Shepherd finds all that he needs and spreads it before him. He does not lack a heavenly home because the Shepherd has gone to prepare it for him and will return to lead him to it. All these items are provided through the hard work of the Shepherd.

In the same way, the needs of God's people—whether in families, homes, or churches—are provided by the hard work of those whom the Lord has appointed as undershepherds. This includes most of us. If God's people do not receive good spiritual food, it is usually because some minister is not working hard enough to provide it. If a family lacks love and security, it is because the parents are not working hard to provide these things in the home. If the widows are not cared for, it is because the deacons are slothful. If the church is not given proper

spiritual direction, the elders are failing in their responsibility. The list could be carried on indefinitely.

Are we diligent? Do we work hard? One very hard worker, Watchman Nee of China, once wrote, "Only a diligent servant is of use to [the Lord. So] do not let us regard this matter lightly. ...We shall have to deal with ourselves unsparingly before the Lord if we are to become workers who are not 'unprofitable' in his service."

Patient

Third, we need to be patient—not with ourselves, of course, but with the sheep. This arises from the fact that sheep are sheep and that they need to be dealt with patiently.

A Christian humorist once said, "To look at the behavior of some ministers you would think that instead of having said, 'Feed my sheep,' the Lord had actually said, 'Teach my trained dogs new tricks.'" This stimulates an interesting train of thought, for it is true that some regard God's people as anything but sheep. Some, as the humorist indicated, act as though God's people were circus dogs. Others act as though they were attack dogs; so they are always telling them to "Go, get the liberals" or "Go, get the Communists." Some treat Christians like horses, getting them to charge some obstacle. Still others regard them as robots—they don't have to think; they just need to be programmed. But we are not dogs or horses or robots. God calls us sheep, and sheep need patience.

Moreover, sheep are different, as I pointed out before. Some go too fast; we need to be patient with those. Others are too slow; we need to be patient with those who fall behind. In this as in other matters we need to learn from the Chief Shepherd.

A Good Example

Fourth, we need to be a good example. This is what Peter is talking about primarily in the verses in which Jesus is called the "Chief Shepherd." He is writing to elders in these verses, though his words also

apply more widely. He says, "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers— not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (1 Peter 5:1-4). Are we like that? Are we examples of mature Christian understanding, faithfulness in the midst of persecution, Christian morality, love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control, and all the other virtues? The point of these words is that we should be such and that we also should be examples in our careful feeding of the sheep.

Self-Sacrificing

A shepherd must be self-sacrificing. This is the fifth characteristic. What is it that characterizes the good shepherd in Jesus' description of him in John 10? Above all, that he gives his life for the sheep. We will never be able to give our lives as Jesus gave his life for us—he died for us as our sin-bearer—nevertheless, there are other ways in which we can give our lives for others. We can give our time in order to help them. We can sacrifice things that we would rather do or rather have in order to serve and give to others. In other words, we must put others ahead of ourselves. Our primary desire must be for their spiritual well-being and comfort.

The world says, "Me first; others second; God last." The order for believers should be, "God first; others second; myself last." It does not sound like a very attractive order to the natural mind, but the truth is that this is the way to a full life and a joyful existence. It takes self-sacrifice if a parent is to raise children properly, if a pastor is to guide and teach his people effectively, if a Sunday school teacher is to help her pupils, or if any worthwhile thing is to be accomplished. But it is rewarding. It is a source of great joy.

Moved by Love

Finally, the shepherd needs to be moved by love. Jesus loves us; he cares for his sheep. So ought we to love one another and care for one another. By this men should know that we are his disciples (John 13:34-35).

But where are we to learn this love? The only answer is: from Jesus. Therefore, we must learn to love him first of all, for it is only after this that we shall be able to love those whom he entrusts to our care. This was the last lesson the Lord Jesus Christ had for Peter. Peter had denied him three times, and the Lord wished to recommission Peter for service. So he came to Peter with the question: "Peter, do you love me?" It was repeated three times. On each occasion Peter answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you," and Jesus then replied, "Feed my sheep." He knew that once Peter had come to love him he would love others also and would care for them.

So it is with all the lessons we are to learn. It is from Jesus himself that we learn them. Take the men from the Old Testament who are known as having been shepherds, and ask them where they learned to be shepherds.

Look at Jacob. He was not a particularly praiseworthy character. He was a cheat and a coward. But in one respect he was praiseworthy—he was a good shepherd. He was known for his faithful *care* of the sheep (Gen. 30:31; 31:36-42). Moreover, later (after the Lord had dealt with him), he was known for his care of his family in exactly the same way. We say to him, "Jacob, where did you learn to be a good shepherd? Where did you learn to care for the sheep?"

Jacob replies, "Well, it is true that I did care for the sheep; but I did not learn it of myself. It was not that I was faithful. I learned it rather from the Good Shepherd, the Shepherd of Bethel, who revealed himself to me and who cared for me during the years of my exile."

We turn next to Joseph and say to him, "Joseph, you too were a shepherd in your youth; it is said of you that you were faithful in

feeding the sheep (Gen. 37:2). Moreover, you were used by God later to feed people; for as ruler in Egypt you were used to store up grain that helped preserve millions of people during a great famine. Where did you learn that? Where did you learn to be faithful in feeding the sheep?"

Joseph answers, "From the God of my fathers, who fed me during the years of my slavery and imprisonment."

"Moses, even you were a shepherd. You were raised in Egypt in the court of Pharaoh, but you spent the next forty years of your life in the deserts of Midian caring for the flocks of Reuel. It is said of you that you *watered, protected, and guided* the sheep (Exod. 2:16-17; 3:1) Just as under God you later watered, protected, and guided the people of Israel during the forty years of their desert wandering. Where did you learn to do that? Where did you learn to give such care?"

Moses tells us that it was not from himself that he learned it, but rather from God's protection and guidance of him as he fled from Egypt.

Finally, we see David. "David, you are preeminently the shepherd of Israel, the great shepherd king. As a boy you cared for the sheep; for you were the youngest in the family, and it was the job of the youngest to care for them. During those years you showed prowess in *defending* the sheep, for we read that you killed both a lion and a bear in rescuing them (1 Sam. 17:34-36). Later you showed similar prowess in defending Israel against even greater enemies. Where did you learn such courage?"

David says he learned it from the Great Shepherd about whom he had written. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (Ps. 23:4-5).

Each one learned what he learned from the Shepherd of Israel. We can be good shepherds too if we can first say, "The Lord is my shepherd," and then learn from him.

Chapter 126.
One Flock, One Shepherd

John 10:16, 19-21

In previous studies of the parable of the Good Shepherd in John 10, we have passed over one very important verse to which we must now return. It is a verse that deals with the church—for the first time in the Gospel—and that therefore sets the pattern for much of the teaching about the church that follows. It tells us about those who are members of the church, about how they become members, about the unity of the church, and about the Shepherd who is its sole head. In terms of the imagery involved, we may say that it teaches about the sheep, the flock, and the shepherd.

The verse is John 10:16: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."

Other Sheep

The first part of the verse deals with "other sheep" who in the context of the parable are Gentiles.

The opening verses of the chapter have already spoken of one pen, or fold. That fold was

Judaism; it was Christ's teaching that he had come to call those who were his own out of Judaism. The man who had been born blind was one example. The disciples were others. In the next chapter Mary, Martha, and Lazarus also are seen to be Christ's sheep, similarly called out of Judaism. Now Christ teaches that there are other folds from which many more sheep must be called—the fold of the Greeks, of the Romans, the barbarian fold, and others. In each of these folds Christ has those who are his own, who have been given to him by the Father, for whom he was about to die, and whom he would call. These are now to

form that one great flock, the church, of which he is the one true Shepherd.

What wonderful things Jesus says about these sheep. In the first place, he says that he *has* them—"I have other sheep"—that is, he says they are his already. If they were not, he would have had to say, "I will have other sheep" or "I hope to have other sheep," assuming that all things would go as he hoped they would go. But this is not the expression used. Jesus says they are his and he has them.

I am sure that as he said this none of these sheep were in the minds of the disciples. They were hoping that Jesus would become the Messiah of Judaism, and they probably hoped that many, if not all, of the Jews would believe on him. But did their minds stretch beyond the fold of Judaism to see that Christ had sheep in Samaria, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, Macedonia, Rome, Gaul, Spain, or other countries of the then known world? I doubt it. I doubt if Peter or James or John ever thought of Rome or Greece as eventual recipients of the gospel. And yet, Jesus was thinking of these places even then and was teaching that he had those living in them who would believe on him.

Spurgeon once wrote on this theme, "Our Shepherd-King has greater thoughts than the most large-hearted of his servants. He delights to enlarge the area of our love."

This verse reminds us of Christ's similar words to the apostle Paul recorded in the eighteenth chapter of Acts. On this occasion Paul was in Corinth, having come there from a not-toosuccessful preaching mission in Athens. Moreover, he had just experienced opposition from the Jewish population in Corinth. No doubt Paul was somewhat discouraged at this point. But here in Corinth, at this very point in his ministry, the Lord appeared to him by night in a vision and said, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10). Many people! What a comfort that must have been to Paul and how bold he must have been as he set out to find these sheep who belonged to the flock of the Great Shepherd. There is also

comfort for those of God's people who love their fellowmen and who wish to witness to them of Christ's love. I have been told, "If Christ already has his sheep, what is the use of witnessing to them?" But I say, "What is the use of witnessing if he does not?" It is the fact that the sheep are his that makes us bold in Christ's service. If they were the devil's sheep, I would not bother. The devil is stronger than I am. Besides, to steal his sheep would be wicked. But they are not his sheep; they are Christ's sheep. God the Father gave them to Christ. Christ died to pay the price of their full redemption. Therefore, I can be bold in searching them out. If they are Christ's, I can step to the very borders of hell to call them back to him.

Then, too, notice this saying. Jesus says he *must bring* them—"I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also." It would be a great enough encouragement were Christ to have stopped after the first statement, telling us that he had certain sheep. That is great, but when he tells us that he must bring those sheep—well, if the first statement is sufficient to get us witnessing, the second should literally propel us forward.

Years ago I preached a sermon entitled "The Musts of the Master." The message considered this verse and three others. First, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up" (John 3:14). This spoke of the necessity of Christ's death. Second, "Knew ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49 KJV). This referred to the whole of Christ's life. Third, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today" (Luke 19:5). Here the divine necessity is applied to the calling of the individual. Then, our text, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also." Here the principle is applied to the calling of God's people throughout the world.

Most of us do not like the thought of necessity. We do not like to be told, "You must!" Kings certainly do not like necessity. Yet here is One who is a King of kings, above all kings, who nevertheless glories in the fact that he must bring these people.

Moreover, when Jesus says "must," things happen. When I say "must," things may happen, although not necessarily. When he says "must," difficulties vanish, mountains are torn down, life comes out of death, hell is vanquished, men believe. Do you not feel that you should have a part in that conquest? Do you not feel compelled to go out into the highways and byways and draw God's people to the wedding feast that the tables may be filled? If this does not move you, what will? If this does not encourage you, how can you be encouraged?

Then, too, notice that Jesus tells us how those who are to believe will come to him. It is *by hearing*—by hearing his voice, by hearing the gospel. There is no other way by which men and women can be brought to him. I believe that we should be alert to any means by which the gospel may be conveyed to people, and we should certainly be as clear and contemporary in our presentations as we know how to be. But we must not confuse our methods with the gospel, thinking somehow that it is the method rather than the gospel that saves people. It is by the proclamation of the cross that men and women are won (1 Cor. 2:1-5). It is through the foolishness of preaching that God saves some (1 Cor. 1:21). Speak the word of the cross, and some will believe. The word of Christ guarantees it. Moreover, the history of the church confirms the truth and wisdom of Christ's teaching.

One Flock

The second major subject in this verse is the flock, and it is the teaching of Christ that there is to be one flock for those whom he calls to himself. "There shall be one flock and one shepherd."

Here, of course, we must understand precisely what Christ says; for this verse has been both badly translated and misused, with the result that serious damage has been done to the church and to Christian thinking. The initial error can be traced to Jerome and the Latin Vulgate, for in that version Jerome failed to distinguish between a "fold" (which is mentioned in the first part of the verse) and a "flock" (which is mentioned later). There are two entirely different words in Greek, yet Jerome treated them the same, and many of our translations have

followed him. The error is corrected in the RSV, NEB, NASB, and NIV. In Jerome's version, Jesus seems to be saying that there is only one organization, and the obvious deduction was that there could therefore be no salvation outside the formal organization of the Roman Church. This became official Roman teaching. Thus, Catholics were taught that Jesus was speaking of an organization and that, since there can be no salvation apart from membership in that organization, there could therefore be no salvation apart from the church of Rome. But all this is based upon a wrong translation, as I have said.

The church about which Christ was speaking is not an organization (though it obviously has organized parts) but rather the entire company of those who own the Lord Jesus Christ as their Shepherd. Thus, the unity comes not from the fact that the sheep are all forced into one organization but in the fact that they have all heard Jesus and have left lesser loyalties to follow him. Moreover, to the degree that they do follow him there is also a visible (though not necessarily a structural) unity that follows.

The question is: Do we truly acknowledge such unity? The answer, even for evangelicals, is that we often do not. The error of the Roman Catholic Church is the error of supposing that the Holy Spirit must work and, in fact, will only work along ecclesiastical lines. That is a real error. But precisely the same error exists within Protestantism. It is not so much that there are different denominations within Protestantism. That in itself does not bother me; for people are different, and there is no reason at all why there ought not to be different organizations with different forms of service and church government to express those differences. The fact that there are different denominations is not the problem. Indeed, to insist that there must be one great Protestant denomination (which some in the ecumenical movement insist on) is the precise error of Romanism. No, the problem lies along another line entirely. It is that believers within one denomination refuse to cooperate with believers within another denomination, justifying this on grounds that the other Christian is somehow contaminated by his associations, or

is disobeying the Lord by remaining in his church, or is not actually (which is sometimes said) a Christian.

That is the problem. Evangelicals are more guilty of this than anyone, and I do not hesitate to say that this is the greatest single cause for the hindrance of the advance of the gospel in the world today—greater than liberalism, greater than humanism, greater than the materialism and rampant immorality of our time. Moreover, it is sin. We will not have great revival until true believers repent of this sin and ask God to cleanse them of it.

What are we to conclude about the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, then, on the basis of these and other biblical passages? I can state it in the following four principles:

1. According to the Lord Jesus Christ, there is one church to which all who confess him as Lord and Savior belong. Therefore, all who are Christians are one with all other true Christians and should acknowledge that to be true, even though the other believer is wrong about or denies what we consider to be important doctrines.

2. Nothing in the Bible tells us that there is to be or that we should desire one allencompassing organization. As a result of this we may expect God to call people to faith in Christ within various organizations and to lead believers into Christian service within those organizations. We dare not say that another believer is out of God's will because he is serving there.

3. God's people need one another and must learn from one another. This does not mean that each of us will therefore think other believers are completely right in church matters or even in doctrine—we do not dare say that we are totally right—but it does mean that we need to learn something about the body of Christ and receive help for the body of Christ from all other Christians.

4. Because of the love that is to bind the true church together, we also have an obligation to demonstrate that love-unity tangibly, over and above denominational programs and concerns. Indeed, we must; for it is the indispensible basis for our mission. "By this"— your love for one another—"all men will know that you are my disciples," said Jesus (John 13:35).

One Shepherd

Is there a cure for such problems? Of course. It is to be found in the third great subject of this verse—the Shepherd. He is the source of our unity and its basis. Therefore, it is only in Jesus Christ that two men, or women, or races can ever become one.

In his commentary on this passage William Barclay tells of an incident from the life of Egerton Young, the first missionary to the Red Indians of Saskatchewan, Canada. Young had gone to these Indians with the message of the love of God the Father, and they had received it like a new revelation. When he told his message an old chief said, "When you spoke of the great Spirit just now, did I hear you say, 'Our Father'?"

"Yes, I did," said the missionary. "We know Him as Father because He is revealed to us as

Father by Jesus Christ."

"That is very new and sweet to me," said the chief. "We never thought of the great Spirit as Father. We heard Him in the thunder; we saw Him in the lightning, the tempest and the blizzard, and we were afraid. So when you tell us that the great Spirit is *our Father,* that is very beautiful to us." The chief paused, and then, as though the glory of it were even then breaking over him, he asked, "Missionary, did you say that the great Spirit is *your* Father?" "I did," said Young.

"And," said the chief, "did you say that He is the Father

of *the Indians?*" "Yes," said the missionary.

"Then," said the old chief, like one on whom the light had now burst, *"you and I are brothers. "*

This is the only possible unity for men on this earth. Nothing we ever do will abolish distinctions between nations. There will always be nations. Nothing (so far as I can see) will ever abolish denominations. But in spite of these things—in spite of race, nations, and denominations—there can be a real and visible unity for those who acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and
Shepherd. As Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says in his volume on the second chapter of Ephesians, "We are all equally sinners. ...We are all equally helpless. ...We have all come to one and the same Savior. ...We have the same salvation. ...We have the same Holy Spirit. ...We have the same Father. ...We even have the same trials. ...And finally, we are all marching and going together to the same eternal home." It is a knowledge of these truths and, above all, of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for us that will draw us closer to one another.

Chapter 127.
True Words Plainly Spoken

John 10:22-26

Several years ago, when I was speaking to someone about the gospel, the person to whom I was speaking replied that the discussion was merely a question of "semantics." I suspected that he had just learned that word, for he used it several times in the course of our discussion, in each case suggesting that there is no such thing as truth, that all ideas are relative, and that a person may therefore call himself a Christian while at the same time believing anything he wishes to believe. His reason was his feeling that language cannot be pressed to the point of precise definition. I acknowledged that it is sometimes hard to define words, particularly theological words. Theology is the art of defining precisely what certain words mean and do not mean. But at the same

time I denied that this was any excuse for failing to grapple with the precise demands of God made in Scripture or for refusing to alter one's life accordingly. The young man would not accept this, however. So he continued to use "semantics" as an excuse for failing to believe on Jesus Christ. He also, so it seemed to me blamed God for his problem, for he was suggesting that things would be very different had God only expressed himself more clearly.

To this person and to all who think that God has not been clear enough in his revelation, the verses in John's Gospel to which we now come should be important.

The Complaint

At this point the Lord Jesus Christ was approaching the end of his public ministry. He had been in Galilee and Judea for nearly three years and had been teaching publicly for that time. He had not often said, at least explicitly, that he was the Messiah—the people were looking for a political messiah—and if he had done that he would have raised false hopes. Still, he had been open in many claims, saying that he had a right to other persons' loyalties and was able to satisfy all legitimate wants and needs. He had healed the sick, given sight to the blind, and done many other things that were in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. These were sufficient grounds for anyone to have recognized the nature of his claims or at least to have followed him in order to have learned more. But the people did not want this. So, rather than simply saying that they did not want it or did not want to believe Christ, they said that he had not taught them plainly.

The text says, "The Jews gathered around him, saying, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly' (v. 24).

We need to see, moreover, that in asking this question Christ's hearers were actually trying to place the blame for their lack of belief on Jesus. This is clear from the language; for they prefaced the complaint with the question: "How long will *you* keep us in suspense?" In other words, they were saying that their failure to believe was his fault, in spite of the

fact that he had been clear in his teaching and had been doing miracles among them for three years.

That makes me think of the story from Genesis in which Adam tried to do the same thing. God had given the man and woman the greatest freedom anyone has ever known. They were free to subdue the earth, free to eat of any tree of the Garden. But there was one tree, a symbol of the fact that they were still God's creatures and were dependent on him, the fruit of which they were not to eat. God had said, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17). In other words, God had said, "You may eat of anything north of here, east of here, south of here, and west of here; but this tree is a symbol of your dependence upon me, and you shall not eat of it."

This bothered Adam. It did not bother Eve so much, for there is nothing in the Bible to indicate that she found God's command offensive. Eve, we are told, sinned through being deceived. The serpent told her that if she ate of the tree her eyes would be opened to discern between good and evil and that she and Adam would become like God. She believed the serpent, rather than trusting God; so she ate of the fruit. The Bible says, "The woman who was deceived ... became a sinner" (1 Tim. 2:14).

On the other hand, Adam was not deceived. He sinned deliberately, saying in effect, "I do not care if I can eat of every tree north of here, east of here, south of here, and west of here; so long as this tree is forbidden to me I hate it, and I hate God who gave it." So Adam ate deliberately, understanding precisely what he had done.

When God came to them—this is the point for which I tell the story—he came to the man first (because his sin was greater) and found that Adam denied responsibility. When he turned next to the woman she admitted what she had done and did not attempt to excuse herself. She said, "The serpent deceived me and I ate" (Gen. 3:13). But Adam ... Adam tried to escape his guilt by shifting it both to God and the woman. Adam said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it" (Gen. 3:12). In other words, Adam

blamed the woman as a secondary cause; and he blamed God as a first cause because it was God who had given him the woman. This is what we are all guilty of, for it is the nature of sin to blame others. Thus, we find the people of Christ's day blaming him for their lack of belief and (in the same way) many in our day blaming him also.

Do you do this? If so, may I warn you of how dangerous it is. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). But if we blame God, our hearts are hardened and the day of grace passes by. I am certain that John is suggesting that this was so for those who asked this question of Jesus. Here both the context and the language are important. The incident took place near the end of Christ's public ministry. It was winter. For these quibblers the summer of Christ's ministry was over and the warmth of his life and teaching was about to be withdrawn. As he gives these details John most certainly has these overtones in mind. So what can be said of these quibblers? Surely, as Jeremiah declared, "The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved" (Jer. 8:20). I trust that this is not true of you. Unbelief may seem logical to our way of thinking, but it is not logical to God's way of thinking; and it is with his thinking that you and I have to do. According to him we have been told everything we need to know and are therefore without excuse if we fail to believe on Christ as our Savior.

Christ's Answer

This is precisely what the Lord Jesus Christ replied to these who had voiced their complaint, "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." He said that he *had* told them plaintly. Moreover, his works substantiated his teachings. He said, "I did tell you, but you did not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me" (v. 25).

What gracious works these were and how richly they substantiate Christ's claims! The words alone had caused some to believe. It was the testimony of the Samaritans that they had believed Jesus because "we have heard for ourselves," rather than because of the testimony of the woman whom Jesus had met at the well (4:42). The nobleman who had

his son restored to health by Jesus "took Jesus at his word" (4:50). Peter had testified, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (6:68). These had believed on the basis of the words alone. Yet, there were also Jesus' many works that substantiated them.

In John's Gospel the works are called "signs," as we saw in chapter 5. A sign is a symbol; that is, it points to something signified. The miracles are signs in that they point to the unusual ability or character of the one performing them.

There are seven great miracles recorded in the Gospel of John. The first is the miracle at Cana of the changing of water into wine (2:1-11). John tells us that this was the first of Christ's signs and that, as a result of it, the disciples believed on him. The second miracle is the healing of the nobleman's son (4:46-54). This work shows Christ's power to overcome sin and sickness and to instill peace and faith in the human heart. The third sign is the healing of the impotent man (5:116). The meaning of this is that all men are spiritually impotent—they cannot come to Jesus — but that Jesus acts in grace to call them to himself in spite of their inability. Fourth, there is the feeding of the five thousand (6:1-14). Here Jesus is revealed as the One who alone can satisfy the hunger of the human soul. Fifth, there is the walking of Christ upon the water in which his power over the elements is dramatized (6:15-21). The sixth miracle is the healing of the man who had been born blind (9:1-41). Finally, there is the raising of Lazarus (11:1-44). Each of these reveals something about Jesus that we would not have seen so clearly otherwise, and each supports his claim upon men's loyalty.

"But these are not enough," some say. "Let him do more." Well, says John, Jesus did quite a bit more. In fact, he says, if everything about Jesus was written that could be written, even the world itself would not be able to contain the books. This is enough—that is the point. These words and works are sufficient. Consequently, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31).

To ask for evidence or for plain speech is a good procedure if evidence or plain speech is lacking. But if these are present, then to ask for more evidence or for plainer speech is only an attempt to avoid responsibility and shift the blame. Suppose that you are driving down a super highway at sixty-five miles per hour and that the speed limit is fifty-five. A policeman stops you and says, "What are you doing? Don't you know that the speed limit is fifty-five?"

"That's a good question," you say. "Actually, I was wondering about that. Is it fifty-five? Or is it sixty-five? I was going sixty-five."

"I'll say you were," says the trooper, "and sometimes it was seventy. Didn't you see that sign back there?"

"Oh! That sign!" you answer. "Well, actually I did see it; but that was a quarter of a mile back. It seems to me that if the state wants drivers to move along at that speed, it should mark the speed limit more plainly. There should be a sign here, for instance. And there should be one another hundred feet ahead, and another hundred, and so on."

What does the trooper do? Does he say, "I am so sorry that I stopped you. I see your point. There should be more signs. Go on your way. We'll put up a dozen new signs by next week"? Of course not! If you would answer a trooper like that, he would have you ticketed so quickly that you would hardly know what happened. The fault is not in the signs. The fault is in the driver who does not like to abide by regulations and who prefers to be his own authority.

Do not tell God that he has not revealed the truth plainly. Say rather that you do not like the truth he has revealed. And let that truth move you to repentance and faith in the Savior.

Do We Follow?

We must stop at this point for a few conclusions. But before we do, let me point out that what we have seen thus far is not the whole of Christ's answer to the demand that he speak plainly. His first answer, as we have seen, is that he had spoken plainly. He had said everything that could be

said. He had done everything that could be done. If they had not believed by this time, nothing else he would ever say or do would move them. But they had asked him to speak plainly. So in the second part of his answer this is precisely what he does. It is a dangerous thing to ask Christ to speak plainly, for when he speaks plainly he *really* speaks plainly. He tells it like it is. In the verses that follow, and which we will discuss in our next chapter, Jesus gives the most highly condensed statements of the doctrines of grace in the entire Gospel, saying that in themselves men and women are unable to believe, that those who believe do so only because God acts in grace to elect them into the company of his people, that all whom God elects do, in fact, come and that none of those who comes is ever lost. These are the central doctrines of the reformed faith as it has been expressed by Jesus, Paul, Augustine, Calvin, and a host of others. If you want it plainly, this is it. This is pure biblical teaching.

At the same time we must add that the doctrines of grace cannot be used as an excuse to escape responsibility. It is true that we cannot choose God unless he first chooses us, doing a miracle in our hearts by which we understand these things and respond to him. But we are, nevertheless, responsible for the things we do choose and for the way in which we handle his revelation. What about Christ's words? What about his works? You cannot escape them. If they are true—and what possible reason do you have to doubt them save that someone has told you at one time or another that the Bible is not true, that it is only a collection of stories, and that without evidence—if they are true (I repeat it), then wisdom and simple honesty demand that you drop all lesser loyalties and follow Jesus. This is what he wants. He says, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (v. 27). So, listen! Really listen! And follow Jesus!

But perhaps you already are a Christian. If that is the case, then this applies to you also. You say,
"But I already believe that Jesus is God and that his words are truthful. I do not doubt what the Bible says." Good! But that is not in itself the full definition of those who have been called to be his sheep by the Father.

Jesus says that those who are his sheep both hear his voice and follow him.

So, do you hear? Do you *really* hear? And do you follow? If you are going your own way, what right do you have to think that you are one of his sheep? If you will not listen to God's truth, what right do you have to think that you belong to him?

In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews we are told about some of Christ's sheep and of what they did when they heard the voice of their Shepherd and followed him. Abel heard and *offered* a better sacrifice. Enoch heard and *pleased* God. Noah heard and *built an ark.* Abraham heard and *obeyed.* Isaac *blessed Jacob* concerning things to come. Jacob *blessed the sons of Joseph* in accord with God's promises. Joseph *gave instructions* about his bones. Moses *chose* rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Rahab heard and *received* the spies in peace. Others, we are told *conquered* kingdoms, *administered* justice, *gained* what was promised, *shut* the mouths of lions, *quenched* the fury of the flames, *escaped* the edge of the sword, had weakness *turned to strength, became powerful* in battle, *routed* foreign armies. Women *received* back their dead raised to life again. Others *were tortured* and refused to be released so that they might gain a better resurrection (vv. 33-35).

In each of these cases life was different because the one involved had heard God's call and followed his leading. Do we hear? Do we follow? God grant that it might be so increasingly for Jesus' sake.

Chapter 128.
Christ, the Calvinist

John 10:27-29

One time, after I had preached a sermon from John touching on some of the main points of the Reformed faith, I found a copy of that week's

bulletin on which someone had scribbled his opinion of the message: "I'm sick of Calvinism in every sermon."

The message did not particularly bother me. Notes like that seldom do. But I found it surprising that the person who wrote the note somehow regarded Calvinism as a system of thought that could well be dispensed with while, nevertheless, as he assumed, still preserving Christianity. In other words, this person, like many others, somehow regarded the doctrines that go by the name of Calvinism as at best an addition to the pure gospel and at the worst a system that is opposed to it. Is this true? Are the doctrines of grace wrong? One proof that they are not is seen in the verses to which we come in this chapter.

Historic Calvinism

The verses I have in mind are those in which the Lord Jesus Christ spoke plainly to his enemies, saying that those who do not believe on him do not believe because they are not his sheep, that those who are his sheep believe and follow, that this is true because they are given to him by the Father, that these who are given to him by the Father inevitably come to him and, finally, that these who come will never be lost. This is a message of man's complete ruin in sin and God's perfect remedy in Christ, and it can be expressed in the distinctive points of Calvinistic theology. Before we look at these points in detail, however, we should see that far from being an aberration or addition to the gospel, these truths have always belonged to the core of the Christian proclamation and have been characteristic of the church at its greatest periods.

To begin with, the doctrines of grace that have become known as Calvinism were most certainly not invented by Calvin, nor were they characteristic of his thought alone during the Reformation period. As we shall see, these are the truths taught by Jesus and confirmed for us in Scripture by the apostle Paul. Augustine argued for the same truths over against the denials of Pelagius and those who followed him. Luther was a Calvinist. So was Zwingli. That is, they believed what Calvin believed and what he later systematized in his influential *Institutes of the*

Christian Religion. The Puritans were also Calvinists; it was through them and their teaching that both England and Scotland experienced the greatest and most pervasive national revivals the world has ever seen. In that number were the heirs of John Knox: Thomas Cartwright, Richard Sibbes, Richard Baxter, Matthew Henry, John Owen, and others. In America, thousands were influenced by Jonathan Edwards, Cotton Mather, and George Whitefield, all of whom were Calvinists.

In more recent times the modern missionary movement received nearly all its direction and initial impetus from those in the Calvinistic and Puritan tradition. The list includes such men as William Carey, John Ryland, Henry Martyn, Robert Moffat, David Livingstone, John G. Paton, John R. Mott, and many others. For all these the doctrines of grace were not an appendage to Christian thought but were rather that which was central and which most fired and gave form to their preaching and missionary efforts.

This, of course, is precisely why I am reviewing this history—to show that the doctrines known as Calvinism are not something that emerged late in church history but rather are that which takes its origins in the teachings of Jesus, which has been found throughout the church in many periods, and which has always been characteristic of the church at its greatest periods of faith and expansion. It follows from this that the church of Jesus Christ will again see great days when these truths are widely proclaimed, and proclaimed fearlessly.

Jesus is our example. We sometimes think of these doctrines as household doctrines; that is, as truths to be proclaimed only to those who already believe. But this was not Jesus' procedure. He taught them also to his enemies. In this case, they had come to him with the implication that he was responsible for their failure to believe; they had said, "If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." He answered this, not so much with a statement concerning his identity as the Messiah (although he did say that his words and works authenticated him), but much more importantly by a full statement of man's utter inability to choose God and of the necessity for divine grace in each step of salvation. Did they want it told plainly? Well, this is the truth told plainly: "You do not

believe because you are not my sheep. ...My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand" (vv. 26-29).

State of the Lost

First of all, Christ's words reflect the desperate state of the lost; that is, the state of all men as they are apart from Christ. The teachings on this point are not so much direct as indirect. Still they underlie the positive points made in this passage.

In reference to man's desperate state apart from Christ, these verses show that he has lost spiritual life; otherwise it would not be necessary for Christ to speak of it as a gift. Originally, man had life. When the first man and woman were created by God they were created with that life that shows itself in communion with him. Consequently, we learn that they communed with God in the Garden in the cool of the day. When they sinned, this life was lost, a fact evidenced by their hiding from God. This has been the state of people ever since. Consequently, when the gospel is preached, those who hear it turn away unless God intervenes to do a supernatural work of regeneration in their hearts.

Moreover, the desperate state of people apart from Christ is suggested by the fact that no one can recover this life except as a free gift from God. Jesus calls it a gift, for it is undeserved and unearned. If it were earned, it would be wages; if it were merited, it would be a reward. But eternal life is neither of these. It is a gift, which means that it originates solely in God's good will toward men.

As a last thought on this subject, it is also true, is it not, that men and women will perish except for this gift. Jesus says of those to whom he gives life that "they shall never perish." But since he makes this promise, it must be because we will perish if he does not intervene. We are sinners. Sin makes us heirs of God's wrath. If God does not intervene, we stand under divine judgment, without hope, facing the

punishment due us for our own sins. According to these verses, we cannot even come to Christ, for we are not of his sheep and so lack the ability to hear his voice and turn to him.

Grace

This brings us to the next thought. For while it is true that in ourselves we cannot come to Christ and so lie under God's just condemnation, the main point of these verses is that God has nevertheless acted in grace toward some. Earlier this was expressed by saying that Christ died for the sheep; in other words, by the doctrine of a particular redemption (v. 11). In this section we are told that Jesus has given eternal life to the same people (v. 28), and that these are those whom God has given him (v. 29).

You cannot trace the origins of our salvation farther back than that. In this, as in all things, the origins are to be found in God. Some say, "But surely God called them because he foresaw that some would believe." But it does not say that. Others say, "He chose them because he knew in advance that they would merit salvation." It does not say that either. What it does say is that the initiative in salvation lies with God and that this is found, on the one hand, in God's electing grace whereby he chooses some for salvation entirely apart from any merit on their own part (which, of course, they do not have) and, on the other hand, in Christ's very particular atonement by which he bore the penalty for the sins of these people.

I need to say also, however, that there are aspects of the death of Christ that apply to the world at large. I am not denying that. The death of the Lord Jesus Christ is a revelation of the nature of God. It is a revelation of his hatred of sin in that Christ died for it. It is most certainly a revelation of God's love, for love lay behind it. It is an example to the race. These things are true. But in addition to these there is also a sense in which the Lord Jesus Christ died particularly and exclusively for his own, so that he literally bore the penalty for their particular sins, that they might be forgiven.

These truths do not make us proud, as some charge. Rather they increase our love for God who out of pure grace saves some when none deserve it.

An Effective Call

The third of the reformed doctrines presented by Jesus is the effective call: that is, that God's call of his people is accompanied by such power that those whom he calls necessarily come to him, believing on Christ and embracing Christ for salvation. Jesus expresses this by saying: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (v. 27). It is a mark of the sheep that they both hear and follow their shepherd.

In the Puritan era it was the habit of many preachers to play on these two characteristics, calling them the marks of Christ's sheep. In days when there were many flocks of sheep it was necessary to mark the sheep to distinguish them. In our day, at least on cattle, this is done by branding. On sheep it was often done by cutting a small mark into the ear. "Well," said the Puritans, "each of Christ's sheep has a double mark —on his ear and on his foot. The mark on his ear is that he hears
Christ. The mark on his foot is that he follows him." This is true, of course. It leads us to ask, "Do we hear? Do we follow?" How many of those who come to church on a typical Sunday morning really hear the voice of Christ ox have ever heard it? They hear the voice of the preacher; they hear the voices of the members of the choir. But do they hear Christ? If they do, why are they so critical of what they hear? Why are their comments afterward so much more about the Lord's servant than the Lord? Those who are Christ's hear *Christ.* And they follow him.

But how many who come to church are really following? Most seem to make good leaders—in their own cause—but they are poor followers. They make good critics—of the Bible and of Christ's people—but they are poor disciples. They make respectable wolves, for they ravage the flock, but they do not have the traits of the sheep and would even be contemptuous of them if they had an understanding of what those traits are.

Do not presume on your relationship to Christ. You are not his unless you hear his voice and follow him. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). He said, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:7).

Never Lost

Finally, notice that these verses also speak at length of God's perseverance with his saints. That is, they teach us that none whom God has called to faith in Christ will be lost. Indeed, how can they be, if God is responsible for their salvation? Jesus says, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (v. 28). "But," says someone, "suppose they jump out of their own accord?" "They shall never perish," says the Lord.

"Never?"

"No, never," says Jesus. "They shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."

This does not mean that there will not be dangers, of course. In fact, it implies them; for if Jesus promises that no one will succeed in plucking us from his hands, it must be because he knows that there are some who will try. The Christian will always face dangers—dangers without, from enemies, and dangers within. Still the promise is that those who have believed in Jesus will never be lost. We may add that the Christian may well be deprived of things. He may lose his job, his friends, his good reputation. Still he will not be lost. The promise is not that the ship will not go to the bottom, but that the passengers will all reach shore. It is not that the house will not burn down, but that the people will escape safely.

Do you believe this promise, that you are safe in Jesus' hands, that you will never be lost? Are you able to trust God for this as you have for other truths? I suppose there is a way of explaining away almost everything, but I must say that I do not see how the opponents of eternal security can explain away this text. Am I Christ's? Then it is he who has

promised that neither I nor any who belong to him shall perish. If I do perish, then Jesus has not kept his word, he is not sinless, the atonement was not adequate, and no one in any place can enter into salvation.

I wish that all God's children might come to know and love these truths. I wish that many might be saved by them.

We live in a day that is so weak in its proclamation of Christian doctrine that even many Christians cannot see why such truths should be preached or how they can be used of the Lord to save sinners. This was not always so. It was not always the case that these truths were unused by God in saving sinners.

Did you know that it was these doctrines, particularly the doctrine of God's perseverance with his people, that God used to save Charles Haddon Spurgeon, one of the greatest preachers who ever lived? Spurgeon was saved when he was only fifteen years old, but before that time he had already noticed how friends of his, who had begun life well, made shipwreck of their lives by falling into gross vice. Spurgeon was appalled by such things. He feared that he himself might fall into them. He reasoned like this: "Whatever good resolutions I might make, the probabilities are that they will be good for nothing when temptation [assails] me. I [will] be like those of whom it has been said, 'They see the devil's hook and yet cannot help nibbling at his bait.' I [will] disgrace myself." It was then that he heard of the truth that Christ will keep his saints from falling. It had a particular charm for him and he found himself saying, "If I go to Jesus and get from him a new heart and a right spirit, I shall be secured against these temptations into which others have fallen. I shall be preserved by Him." It was this truth along with others that brought Spurgeon to the Savior.

I wish it might be the same with you! I do not preach a gospel that has a shaky foundation. I do not proclaim a religion of percentages and probabilities. I proclaim the message of Christ, Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and all others who have found God to be their pure hope and salvation. It is the message of man's complete ruin in sin and of God's perfect remedy in Christ, expressed in his election of a people to

himself and his final preservation of them. God grant that you might believe it wholeheartedly.

Chapter 129.
The Hands of God

John 10:28-29

If you have ever watched a carpenter do rough construction work, you may have seen him do something that will illustrate what the Lord was doing as he was speaking these words to the disciples. Since he had been a carpenter Jesus may have done this same thing himself.
Sometimes in rough carpentry a workman will drive a long nail through a thinner board so that the point sticks out the back. Then with a blow of his hammer he will drive the point of the nail over sideways, embedding it in the wood. This is called clinching the nail. It makes the joint just a bit more firm since the nail cannot work itself out from this position.

Two Nails, Four Hands

In a sense this is what Jesus did in these verses. He was so interested in getting the doctrine to stick in his disciples' minds that he not only drove one nail, he drove two, and clinched them both. This is what I mean. First, he taught that those who are his own have been given eternal life. This alone makes the truth fast; for eternal life is life that can never be lost. If it could be lost after a few years or even after many years, it would not be eternal. Nevertheless, Jesus knew that there would be many who would find this difficult to accept and who would attempt to explain it away by saying perhaps that eternal life is a quality of life rather than a life of unending duration. Lest they succeed in doing that, he went on to drive the nail over sideways, thereby clinching it into the wood. "They shall never perish," he said.

"I give them eternal life"—that is the nail. "They shall never perish"—that is the clinch by which the doctrine is reinforced and made fast.

One nail, however well fastened, does not always make a good joint. So Jesus went on to drive a second nail and clinch that. His second nail is found in the phrase "no one can snatch them out of my hand." The clincher is this—"My Father who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." It is hard to see how anyone can be safer or any doctrine clearer than that.

Moreover, there is the matter of the hands. First, Jesus says that we are secure in his hand. We can imagine ourselves as a coin around which his fingers have folded. That is a secure position for any object, but especially for us, considering whose hand it is that holds us. But then, lest we think that this is not enough, Jesus adds that the hand of God is over his hand so that we are enclosed in two hands. We are therefore doubly secure. If we feel insecure, we should be reminded that even when we are held in this manner, the Father and Son still have two hands free to defend us. I wish that all Christians might enter into an assurance of that security. "They shall never perish," says Jesus. Believe it! Believe it, too, when he tells us that no man will ever pluck us out of those hands.

"But," says someone, "it may be true, but to teach it is dangerous. If people believe that nothing can ever snatch them from Christ's hand, then surely they will feel free to sin. If I thought so, I would sin."

Would you? If so, I feel sorry for you. I even doubt that you know the Lord, for my experience indicates that it is a knowledge of the love and grace of God that, more than anything else, keeps a believer from sinning.

"Even if there is a possibility of these truths encouraging sin, would it not be better not to preach them? Would it not be better to tell Christians that they might be overcome by sin and so perish?" No, it would not! Moreover, how could I tell what I do not believe? Shall I slander God with falsehoods? Let me put it in terms that you will surely

understand. Shall I come to your house and tell your children—little Mary, just two years old, or Michael, just six—that if they disobey you they will cease to be your children and that you will throw them out into the streets? If I were to do that, you would be angry, and rightly so. Rather, you would want me to say, "Children, do you not know that your father loves you, that he will never stop loving you? Therefore, do not disappoint him. Love him and do what he says."

Do you understand that illustration? If so, do not impute lesser motives or lesser love to God.
Believe these truths, and allow them to become a great incentive to godly conduct in your life. Moreover, do not be afraid to have them preached, and do not fear to share them with other believers.

Hands of the Father

Let us be specific about the words of our text, particularly about the hands. Jesus said that we are secure in his hand and in the hand of the Father. What do we know about these hands? We recognize, of course, that to talk in this way is at least in part to use poetic language. But the truths are not less true because they are expressed poetically; and in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ the reference to the hands is not even primarily poetic. His hands were real hands. So what do we know about them? And what do we know about the hands of the Father?

Well, the hands of the Father are *creative hands,* for one thing. These are the hands that made the world, that formed man from the earth's dust. The Book of Genesis says: "The LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7).

In biblical thought three truths are closely tied up with this teaching. First, God knows us. He knows us because he made us. So nothing that is within us ever surprises him. That is what David had in mind when he said, "For he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust" (Ps. 103:14). We do not need to fear that something in us will

suddenly rise up to startle God and cause him to change his attitude toward us.

Second, the fact that we have been made by God means that we have been made for a purpose and that it behooves us to realize that purpose. To realize God's purpose is to find fulfillment and joy, not to find misery. Moreover, it is not for us to question the purpose any more than a pot should question the shape it has been given by the potter. This image is used by the apostle Paul in Romans in order to justify the ways of God in his dealings with Israel.

Third, the fact that we have been made by God means that we should acknowledge that and worship him thankfully. One of the Psalms says: "Come, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker, for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care" (Ps. 95:6-7).

Loving Hands

The hands of the Father are creative hands, then. But they are also *loving hands.* That is, they are hands that continue to care for and provide for that which they have made.

My favorite picture of this is found in Hosea. It is of God, as a literal father, caring for Israel, pictured as a child who is just learning to walk. The child can also represent ourselves in spiritual infancy. God says, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. ...It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love.

... How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?"

(Hosea 11:1, 3-4, 8). God says that he has been as a father to us, teaching us to walk. His hands have held us up while we were learning and have caught us when we were about to fall down. Moreover, he

tells us that this is proof of his love and that he will not give up on those who are his true children.

Angry Hands

Finally, we need to see something that is not so pleasant to contemplate. God's hands are creative hands. They are caring hands. But they can also, so says the Scripture, become *angry hands.* They are hands by which judgment can be administered and by which it will be administered to all whose sin is not covered by the blood of Christ and who are therefore not among the company of God's people. John the Baptist spoke of this, saying that when Christ came it would be with fan in hand and that he would thoroughly purge his floor (Matt. 3:12). John was thinking of the way by which, in Mediterranean lands, wheat was separated from the chaff. Usually this was done by tossing the two into the air so that the wind could blow the lighter chaff away. If the wind did not blow, the winnowing would have to be postponed. However, in Christ's day, says John, Christ will provide his own wind; he will use his fan to separate the righteous from those who will not have him as Savior.

It is of the same judgment that the author of Hebrews writes, saying, "The Lord will judge his people," and then adding by way of stern warning, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:30-31).

There is a progression at this point. The hands of God are hands that have created. The hands of God are hands that have loved and cared. But man in general has despised the creation and turned from God's love. There is therefore nothing ahead for such men but God's righteous anger and judgment. This thought so possessed Jonathan Edwards that he preached often upon it. In fact, his best known sermon is on precisely this theme. It is "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," a title taken from the text that I have just mentioned. The text of the message is
Deuteronomy 32:35—"in due time their foot will slip." The point of the sermon is that nothing withholds a man who will not have Christ from

God's judgment except God's sovereign will, by which for a time he withholds punishment.

I am told that such truths cannot be preached today, that such teaching will drive listeners away. That may be. At any rate, I am sure that at least one of three things will happen. Either these truths will drive the people away, or the people will drive the minister away, or there will be a great awakening, as there was under Edwards's preaching.

Some say, "Where is revival today?"

I say, "Where are the faithful teachers of God's Word?" I say, "Let the angry God be proclaimed, as well as the God of love, and men's hearts will be stirred to repentance. They have been before. Do it, and many will flee out of a true sense of need to the Savior."

The Hands of Jesus

Look now at the hands of the Son. What do we know about these hands? Well, first, they are the hands of a workman; they are *rough hands.* These hands know labor; they understand toil. He is not remote, this Jesus. He understands us and feels with us in our infirmities.

Moreover, I see this truth and then turn to a text like John 14:2-3 and find an even greater truth there. We are told: "I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. "Jesus tells us that he has gone to prepare a home for us. Well, then, I will not worry about the condition of that home or even whether it is going to be finished by the date of occupancy, for the greatest carpenter that ever lived is going to build it for me. In the same way, I do not worry about the condition of my resurrection body. For Paul tells us that if our earthly body "were destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven not built by human hands" (2 Cor. 5:1).

The hands of Jesus are also *outstretched hands.* I see the outstretched hands of Jesus everywhere in the New Testament. They are outstretched in healing, for example. I see him reaching out to touch and heal the

leper when no one else would touch him (Matt. 8:3). I see him reach out to heal Peter's mother-in-law when she lay sick of a fever (Matt. 8:15). I see him reach out to restore life to the young daughter of the ruler, recorded in Matthew 9 (vv. 18-26). He touched the son of the widow of Nain to restore his life (Luke 7:11-18). His outstretched hands restored sight to the man who had been born blind (John 9:6-7).

Christ's hands also are outstretched to save such as are floundering. I love the story of Peter walking on the water toward Christ. The disciples were in the boat on the Sea of Galilee when they saw Jesus. He was walking toward them on the water. When Peter saw it he concluded rightly that if Jesus could do it, then by the power of Jesus he could do it also. So he said, "Lord, can I come?" When Jesus agreed, Peter started out. But soon he took his eyes from Jesus, looked at the water instead, and began to sink.

"Lord, save me," he cried.

Immediately, we are told, "Jesus reached out his hand and caught him" (Matt. 14:31). Sinking into the waves? That seems to be a picture of losing salvation. But then we see the outstretched, saving hands of the Lord Jesus. Peter's faith failed, but Jesus did not fail to save Peter.

These hands are stretched out also in blessing. We see the Lord blessing the children, even when the disciples in a fit of self-importance wished to keep them away (Matt. 19:13-15). We find the same thing at the end of Luke's Gospel, in the last picture we have of the Lord Jesus while on earth—"When he had led them out to Bethany he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven" (Luke 24:50-51).

Wounded Hands

The last thing we need to see is, in some respects, the most obvious truth of all. The hands of Jesus are also *wounded hands.* The imprint of the nails of the crucifixion is in those hands, and it is for us that they were wounded. God told us that they would be. It is prophesied in Psalm 22, in which the crucifixion of the Lord is presented: "A band of

evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet" (v. 16). Isaiah wrote: "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). Zechariah foretold that this would be a sign by which the true prophet, the Messiah, would be recognized (Zech. 13:6).

It is by this that we recognize him. Thomas is our pattern. Thomas had not been present on that first occasion when Jesus appeared to his disciples. The others told Thomas about it afterward, but Thomas replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it" (John 20:25). A week later Jesus appeared again, Thomas being present, and offered to fulfill the conditions of Thomas's test. But the mere sight was enough for Thomas. Thomas fell at Christ's feet and worshiped, saying, "My Lord and my God" (v. 28).

Is that sight not clear enough for you also? Are Jesus' wounded hands not evidence enough for you of his love?

God says that his action in Christ is perfectly clear, so much so that there is no excuse for a failure to believe it. In fact, he says that the way of salvation in Christ has been "made known" (Rom. 3:21). The way of salvation has been made as clear as a striking hand or a blow to the face. Today it is the hand of a gracious God who holds out the way of salvation to you. If you reply that you cannot see it, he asks you to look at the hand itself; for it is a wounded hand, one bearing the print of the nail received by Jesus in dying for your salvation. By faith you may put out your hand and touch that wound. You may know that it is evidence, irrefutable evidence, of God's great love for you. That hand was struck for you. The one extending that hand died for you. Allow him to enclose your hand, to enclose you, and to bring you into that great company of those who possess eternal life and who shall *never* perish.

Chapter 130.

The Issue in Six Words

John 10:30-39

The Gospel of John is filled with statements of the full divinity of Jesus Christ, but no statement is clearer than the one to which we come now. The opponents of the Lord asked him to speak plainly, implying that his lack of candor was the cause of their unbelief. So Jesus did speak plainly: first, to say that he had already spoken and acted plainly (it was their sin rather than a lack of evidence that caused their hostility) and, second, to outline the doctrines of God's grace whereby men and women are saved entirely apart from any merit in themselves and are kept secure entirely by God's unchanging good pleasure. It is this latter teaching that leads to the statement of Christ's total divinity with which the discourse closes.

Is Jesus God? That is the great question of John's Gospel. Is he fully divine? In this verse, Jesus declares that he is, doing so in just six words. "I and the Father are one," he says (v. 30). Because of their obvious importance, these words and their sequel deserve both careful study and a personal response.

One in Essence

First of all, what do these words mean? What did Jesus mean when he stated, "I and my Father are one"?

We may begin by saying that at the very least Jesus was claiming to be one with the Father in the matter of his will. This grows out of the context, for he had been speaking of the security of believers and had added that the will both of the Father and of himself was to that end. Believers would never perish, first, because no one could snatch them out of his hand and, second, because no one could snatch them out of the Father's hand. Someone might imagine that the will of the Father and Son in the matter of preserving believers might not be in perfect agreement. But lest they think this, Jesus immediately adds that it is precisely in this that they are united. Because of this unity we know that

when we see Jesus working we see God working, and we know that God is like Jesus.

On the other hand, the phrase "I and the Father are one" obviously also means more than this, for only a full claim to divinity by Jesus explains the way in which the leaders reacted to Jesus' statement. What was their reaction? We are told that "the Jews picked up stones to stone him" (v. 31). Why did they do this? Clearly, because they saw that his statement was not only a claim to be one with the Father in respect of his will but also to be one with him in power—"no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand," and, "no one can snatch them out of my hand"—and that this latter was the same thing as claiming to be fully divine. In theological terms, this is the same as saying that the Son is one in substance with the Father and that they are equal in power and glory.

Four important conclusions follow from this truth concerning Jesus' nature: (1) we have the knowledge of God in him, for he is God; (2) we have forgiveness of sins in him, for his death had infinite merit in atoning for sin; (3) we have victory over circumstances in him, for he lived above circumstances; and (4) we have triumph over death in him, for he rose from the dead and has promised to so raise all whom the Father has given to him, that is, all who believe on him and have eternal life (John 6:39-40, 44, 54).

This is not a "pie-in-the-sky" philosophy. It affects our life now. Let me illustrate this by the following poem written by a good friend of mine who recently died of cancer. The death of this woman was a prolonged affair, accompanied by great pain. But she was not bitter. On the contrary, her speech was full of praise as she thought of Jesus, the one through whom she had come to a knowledge of God and who was even then preparing a place for her in heaven. Her son Peter recorded this testimony six months before her departure:

I read the Psalms when yet my eyes could read And I discovered, oh, so many ways, That the great psalmist felt the urge and need To magnify his God in songs of praise.

Praise is an effort—both when times are good And happiness fills our hearts And in dark times not fully understood. Then it is hard to say: "I'll praise, I will."

I will—a conscious effort. I will praise!

I will love Thee! I will extol!

I will rejoice and make a joyful noise!

Yes, I will praise Thee, Lord, with heart and soul.

But once the songs of praise roll off my tongue I'll serve the Lord with gladness and with joy.
But more than that—I may not praise alone. Praise ye the Lord; ye nations, praise His name. Sing of His mercy. Make His goodness known.

A testimony like that does not come easily to the tongue. But it does come through a knowledge and love of God as he is seen and known in the Lord Jesus.

Three Arguments

The fact that Jesus made a claim to be God is not the same as proving it, of course. And the fact that it needed to be proved is seen by the reaction of his listeners. They dismissed it outright and were ready to stone Christ for having spoken it. But was there proof? Was there evidence that Jesus is who he said he is? In the verses that follow Jesus responds to these questions with three lines of argument.

First, he told his opponents that he had done nothing to merit stoning. He said, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" (v. 32). This was a perfectly valid argument. We recognize the force of it when we refuse to judge a person until we see what he can do. A man may claim to be a good worker, but we do not conclude that he is one until we see him at work. A child may claim to have been good while the mother was out shopping, but the mother does not accept the claim at face value until

she sees the condition of the living room. So it was with the Lord Jesus Christ. He had made a great claim. All right! What was the evidence? Was the claim unverified or was it backed up by works? We all know the answer. Jesus had healed the sick, raised the dead, cured lepers, taught the multitudes. For which of these works did they reject his claim, then? For which of these were they attempting to stone him?

Strangely enough, his opponents reacted to this argument by reversing it, which we know to be wrong. "We are not stoning you for any of these," they said, "but for blasphemy." In other words, they were willing to skip over the issue of whether his works backed up his words, so intent were they on his destruction.

Today there is not quite the same movement to do away with Christ physically—he is not here to be crucified—but the argument is voiced by many who will not have him to be God in their lives. They will admit that he did good works, but they will not accept him as God; they will not consider whether his works support his claim to be divine. One woman who thought this way, declared, "I do not doubt that Jesus was a good man and did many wonderful things, but I will not accept the claim that he is God. I will not follow him."

Because the Jewish leaders thought this way, Jesus introduced another argument. What they were doing was willfully rejecting his words. So Jesus next showed that there was nothing about his words for which they could fault him either. Here's how he put it, "Is it not written in your Law, I have said you are gods'? If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken—what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son?'" (vv. 34-36).

I want to admit, before we get into these verses, that the argument that they contain is a difficult one for most contemporary people to understand. For one thing, it is obviously a rabbinic argument, which means that it depends upon distinctions that were of great importance to the rabbis but that seem at best to be of minor importance to people

today. For another thing, the drift of the argument seems to be in the opposite direction from what we understand Christ to have been saying previously. He was claiming to be God in a unique and absolute sense; but in these verses he seems to be watering down the claim by saying that he meant no more by it than what the Old Testament means when it applied the word "gods" to men. What are we to do in the face of these difficulties? How do we begin to understand Christ's argument?

We need to turn to the text he is quoting and see what the words mean there. Jesus is quoting from the eighty-second psalm, and when we turn to it we discover that the phrase "You are gods" (v. 6) is used of the judges of Israel. The judges in this psalm are called gods, not because they are divine but because they act as God in their role as judges. They are consecrated to a special task, indeed a holy task; and in God's name they exercise authority and power. "Now," says Jesus, "I too have been sent into this world by God the Father and that for a specific task. In that task I exercise authority and power, just as the judges of Israel did. If the word 'gods' can be used of mere men because of their function—if judges can be called gods—then how much more should I be called God in the full sense since I have received a unique commissioning and exercise unique power?"

In other words, Jesus was not denying that he is God in a unique sense—far from it. He was only denying that he had spoken words that were improper. The words are proper enough if spoken merely in relation to man. How much more appropriate are they then of Jesus, who is more than man? Do you see the force of the argument? To our way of thinking it may not be entirely satisfactory, but it should be understandable. We can express it by saying that, not only is there nothing in Christ's *works* to merit stoning, neither is there anything in his *words* to merit stoning.

Finally, we come to Christ's third argument, that to which the others lead up. It is this. Since there was nothing in Christ's words to which these men could properly object and since they acknowledged his deeds, these deeds alone should have led them to faith in him. Jesus put it in these words, "Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does.

But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father" (vv. 37-38). Christ's works should lead men to faith in him. It is as simple as that.

Belief and Good Works

This argument confronts you. If you are not yet a believer in Jesus, this argument is one approach to your heart. Can you accuse Jesus of sin or of an inadequate lifestyle? Hardly! It is rather that he, by his life, accuses you. Do you find his works inadequate, his words unsupportable? Certainly not! Instead, you confess with the many of Christ's own time, "No one ever spoke like this man. ...No one ever did what this man has done." Well, then, let the facts impel you to belief. Throw aside your rebellion and commit yourself to him as his disciple.

Above all, believe on him. I like to distinguish among three different levels of belief. The first level is that on which someone simply believes *something.* It has to do with factual knowledge. A second level of belief is what we might intend when we say that we believe *in something.* In some expressions that word "in" suggests the addition of a value system so that we are saying that the thing we believe in is important. In this sense we may believe in America, in motherhood, in apple pie. The third level of belief is that expressed when we say that we believe *on someone.* This level of belief involves trust and action. It is the kind of faith we exercise when we step onto a bridge, believing that it will hold us up, or when we get into a boat, believing that it is seaworthy and will not go down. This is saving faith. It is the kind of belief Christ calls for on the basis of who he is, what he has done, and what words he has spoken. If you will accept the facts and commit yourself to him in this way, he promises to save you from your sin, give you peace and victory over the circumstances of life, and eventually take you to be with himself in heaven in a place that he has prepared for you. Will you come to him? Will you believe on him as your Savior?

We need to see, too, that there is an application in these verses for the Christian. In these verses the Lord Jesus Christ laid stress upon his

works—not his words but his works—and his point was that these should point men to him. That is a wonderful argument. But if it is true for Jesus, it also is true in some sense for his followers. If you are a Christian, you claim to have been saved by Jesus in such a way that his spirit now lives within you and directs your life and life choices. Do you live like it? Is there anything in your life that is evidence of his spirit within you? Jesus indicated that this should be true of you, for when some marveled at his deeds he answered, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12).

"Full Moon" Revival

We need to acknowledge that even at best there will always be a great difference between the works of Christ and our works. But for that reason we need all the more to turn to him and draw strength from him. Or, to change the metaphor, we need to turn to him so that we may reflect his brilliance to others. He is the sun. When he was in the world he said, "I am the light of the world," and when he was thinking of leaving this world he turned to those whom he was leaving and said, "You are the light of the world." But they were not suns; they were moons. They, like ourselves, could shine only by reflecting his light.

Now is this world's night, for the sun is gone. But here is the moon, the church, composed of those who know the Lord Jesus. How will it shine? Will it shine as a full moon or a new moon? A waxing or a waning quarter? I want it to be a full moon. I think of the early church, the church of the apostles. The church was just a new moon then. But it grew and came to reflect the glory of its departed Lord to such a superlative degree that the entire world eventually sat up and took notice. It can happen again, if we turn our faces toward him. Let us confess that we have no brightness in ourselves. Let us admit our inability to do works worthy of his presence within us. But then, by his grace, let us also allow him to use us to reflect his glory to the world. Let us have a full moon of revival once again.

Chapter 131.
Word of the Living God

John 10:35

In the midst of Christ's reply to the religious leaders of his day, who were accusing him of blasphemy, there is a reference to the nature of Scripture that is so important that it deserves special consideration.

The leaders had accused Jesus of making himself the Son of God, and he had replied by a reference to Psalm 82:6 in which the word "gods" was used of the judges of Israel. "If the word can be used of mere men, how much more can the word be used of me?" was his argument. If Jesus had said nothing more at this point, his use of the psalm would be important; for he was basing his argument on a single word of the Old Testament that he clearly accepted as trustworthy. But he did say more, and what he said are the words we want to study. He said that "the Scripture cannot be broken" (v. 35). In our terms this was an affirmation of the Bible's total inspiration, inerrancy, and utter indestructibility. A great statement! It needs to occupy our attention in this study.

Early Christianity

However, before we look at the precise meaning of the phrase "cannot be broken" we need to see that the high view of the Bible expressed by Jesus in this and many other statements has always been the accepted view of the church—until relatively modern times. In the last two centuries or so the orthodox view of the Bible has been denied by large segments of the church so that for many the Bible has become man's word about God rather than God's word to man, and its authority has been lessened. But this was not always so. In fact, when we turn to past ages we discover that until recently all who claimed to be Christians, even heretics, acknowledged that the Bible was infallible and authoritative.

In the documents of the early Catholic Church there are many statements to substantiate this claim. Cyril of Jerusalem, who lived in the fourth century, said, "We must not deliver anything whatsoever, without the sacred Scriptures, nor let ourselves be misled by mere probability, or by marshalling of arguments. For this salvation of ours by faith is... by proof from the sacred Scriptures" *(Cathechetical Lectures,* IV, 17).

In a letter to Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate, Augustine said, "I have learned to hold the Scriptures alone inerrant." And in his "Preface to the Treatise on the Trinity" he warned, "Do not follow my writings as Holy Scripture. When you find in Holy Scripture anything that you did not believe before, believe it without doubt; but in my writings, you should hold nothing for certain." He wrote: "I believe most firmly that no one of those authors has erred in any respect in writing" (*Epistles,* 82, 1, 3).

The same position holds good for Luther. It is common today, in surveying works that deny a high view of Scripture, to find Luther's reference to the Bible as "the cradle of Christ" quoted as proving that Luther believed in a revelation within the Bible, not identical with it, and held the Scriptures, which speak of Christ, in less esteem than the Christ whom they contain. For some this means that the "cradle" may be discarded in order to reach its treasure. For others it means that not all of the Bible is the Word of God. It is obvious, however, that this is not what Luther meant. Luther's evaluation of the Bible as the "cradle of Christ" occurs at the end of the third paragraph of his "Preface to the Old Testament." And there, as the late Lutheran scholar J. Theodore Mueller has ably demonstrated, Luther is actually defending the value of the Old Testament for Christians. Far from deprecating Scripture, Luther is actually concerned "to express his most reverent esteem of Holy Scripture, which offers to man the supreme blessing of eternal salvation in Christ." Luther himself says in this context in speaking of the Old Testament, "I beg and faithfully warn every pious Christian not to stumble at the simplicity of the language and stories that will often meet him there. He should not doubt that, however simple they may

seem, these are the very words, works, judgments, and deeds of the high majesty, power, and wisdom of God" ("Preface to the Old Testament").

He says elsewhere, "The Scriptures, although they were also written by men, are not of men nor from men, but from God" ("That Doctrines of Men Are to be Rejected"). And again, "We must make a great difference between God's Word and the word of man. A man's word is a little sound, that flies into the air, and soon vanishes; but the Word of God is greater than heaven and earth, yea, greater than death and hell, for it forms part of the power of God, and endures everlastingly" (*Table Talk,* xliv).

In some places, Calvin is even more outspoken. Commenting on 2 Timothy 3:16, he maintains: "This is the principle that distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak of themselves, but as organs of the Holy Spirit uttered only that which they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. All those who wish to profit from the Scriptures must first accept this as a settled principle, that the Law and the prophets are not teachings handed on at the pleasure of men or produced by men's minds as their source, but are dictated by the Holy Spirit." He concludes, "We owe to the Scripture the same reverence as we owe to God, since it has its only source in Him and has nothing of human origin mixed with it."

John Wesley says the same thing: "The Scripture, therefore, is a rule sufficient in itself, and was by men who were divinely inspired at once delivered to the world" (A *Roman Catechism,* Q. 5). "In all cases, the Church is to be judged by the Scripture, not the Scripture by the Church" (*Popery Calmly Considered,* 1, 6).

It was the glory of the church that in its first sixteen or seventeen centuries all Christians in every place, despite their differences of opinion on theology or on questions of church order, exhibited at least a mental allegiance to the Bible as the supreme authority for the Christian in all matters. It might have been neglected. There might have been disagreements about what it actually teaches. It might even have been

contradicted. But it was still the Word of God. It was the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

An Infallible Bible

The fact that the Christians of an earlier day thought along these lines is not an accident of history or, still less, a product of wishful thinking. Christians of an earlier century had a high view of the Bible because the Bible has a high view of itself. Or, to put it in other language, Christians regarded the Bible as the infallible Word of God because the Lord Jesus Christ himself so regarded it.

This is where our text comes in. For when Jesus Christ said, somewhat as an aside, "the Scripture cannot be broken," he was saying (at the very least) that the Scripture cannot be "broken into" or "faulted." That is, Scripture cannot be wrong. Leon Morris comments: "The term 'broken' is not defined, and it is a word which is not often used of Scripture or the like. ...But it is perfectly intelligible. It means that Scripture cannot be emptied of its force by being shown to be erroneous."

This attitude of Jesus to Scripture is confirmed by other statements of his. For one thing, Jesus often appealed to Scripture as an infallible authority. When tempted by the devil in the wilderness, Jesus replied with three quotations from Deuteronomy (Matt. 4:1-11). By quoting Exodus 3:6 ("I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob"), he rebuked the Sadducees for questioning the heavenly status of marriage and the reality of the resurrection (Luke 20:27-40). He taught that "not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will be any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18). On many occasions he appealed to Scripture in support of his actions—in defense of his cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:15-17), in reference to his submission to the cross (Matt. 26:53-54).

In the second place, Jesus saw his life as a fulfillment of Scripture and consciously submitted himself to it. He began his ministry with a quotation from Isaiah 61:1-2—"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because

he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). He taught that he had not come "to abolish" the law and the prophets "but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17). On the night of his arrest he foretold the scattering of the disciples. This would occur because, he said, "It is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered" (quoted from Zech. 13:7 in Mark 14:27). You "search the Scriptures," he told the Jews, "[because] you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39). Even after the resurrection, he chides the disciples for being "'foolish ... and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself (Luke 24:25-27).

On the basis of these and other passages it is beyond doubt that Christ highly esteemed the Old Testament and constantly submitted to it, as to an authoritative revelation. Because they are the words of God, Jesus assumed their complete reliability even to the smallest point of grammar.

Infallibility Unfortunately, the idea of an infallible Bible is widely rejected in our day, even among some evangelicals—first, by those who allege specific errors in the record, and second, by those who interpret the doctrine incorrectly. There are those, for instance, who interpret the claim of infallibility to mean that the Bible cannot report sin or errors. This is not correct. Many people in the Bible spoke lies and acted sinfully, and the Bible records it. But the Bible does not endorse either their lying or their sin. The Bible quotes the devil, but it does not suggest that we believe him.

In the same way, infallibility does not imply completeness, as though the biblical writers were under an obligation to tell all that happened in any given moment. In fact, sometimes they explicitly disavowed this aim (John 20:30). The doctrine of infallibility does not mean that all the

existing manuscripts of the Bible are free from error; they certainly are not. The Holy Spirit inspired the original manuscripts, not the scribes who copied them. The doctrine of infallibility does not imply the infallibility of interpretations of the Bible. These views are misconceptions. The doctrine of infallibility simply means that in their original form the books of the Bible are free from factual errors and that they possess absolute, binding authority when they present teaching that purports to be from God.

Recently the heart of the debate over infallibility has shifted to the function of languages as a vehicle of truth. Some scholars imply that truth transcends language or that Scripture truth resides only in the thoughts, not the words, of Scripture or in the subjective experience of the hearer. But this is nonsense. If the Bible is inspired at all, it must be inspired verbally. And verbal inspiration means infallibility.

Of course, there are parts of Scripture where the choice of a word may make little difference in the recording of a fact or doctrine. The wording of some verses can be changed, as translators sometimes do to convey the proper meaning. But there are other places where the words are supremely important and where the understanding of a doctrine will inevitably suffer if we fail to take the words seriously. Certainly, if we are to have an authoritative Bible at this point, we also must have a verbally inspired and therefore an infallible Bible, a Bible that is infallible at this point and consequently at other points as well.

What happens when the function of language as a vehicle for truth is denied may be illustrated by this story. In one of the classes of one of our prominent theological seminaries a professor had been denying that words have a one-to-one relationship to meaning and had concluded that all truth is subjective. One of the conservative students challenged his professor. He argued that while it is true that we often misunderstand what is meant by a word or words, nevertheless words do have meaning and do convey literal content. The word "airplane" makes all who speak English think of a certain kind of object flying through the sky, he argued. If you say, "Look, an airplane!" people will look up. He gave other illustrations. Finally, the student said to his

professor, "If language is what you say it is, then conversation is meaningless. In fact, this class is meaningless: There is no point in our being here."

There was a moment of silence as the truth of his words sunk in. Then someone said, "If this is meaningless, what shall we do for the rest of the hour?"

"Let's play squash," someone suggested. So the class got up and walked out, leaving the professor alone in his classroom.

God's Hammer

Through the ages men and women have sought to discredit Scripture and remove it as a force in their lives. But it has been those who have sought to destroy the Bible who have been destroyed, not the Bible. There are many images for the Bible in its own pages. It is called a lamp, a mirror, a sword, a seed. Notice that it also is called a fire and a hammer, a fire because it will burn in judgment and a hammer because it will break in pieces all who will not bow before it. "Is not my word like fire?" wrote Jeremiah; "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" (Jer. 23:29).

Will you resist that Word? If so, then you will be broken; for the Scripture cannot be broken. Or will you submit to it and to the Christ who upheld it?

The Bible is not just another book. It is God's book, and as such it is powerful. It will change you, if you will let it. It was a section of the thirteenth chapter of Romans that changed the life of Augustine as he turned to the Bible in the garden of a friend's estate near Milan. Luther tells how in meditating upon the Scripture he felt himself to be "reborn," and relates how Romans 1:17 became for him "a gate to heaven." Wesley's meditation upon Scripture led to his conversion in the little meeting in Aldersgate.

Here is a modern example: "Some years before the publication of the *New English Bible*" writes J. B. Phillips, "I was invited by the BBC to

discuss the problems of translation with Dr. E. V. Rieu, who had himself recently produced a translation of the four Gospels for Penguin Classics. Towards the end of the discussion Dr. Rieu was asked about his general approach to the task, and his reply was this:

'"My personal reason for doing this was my own intense desire to satisfy myself as to the authenticity and the spiritual content of the Gospels. And, if I received any new light by an intensive study of the Greek originals, to pass it on to others. I approached them in the same spirit as I would have approached them had they been presented to me as recently discovered Greek manuscripts.' "A few minutes later I asked him, 'Did you get the feeling that the whole material is extraordinary alive? ...I got the feeling that the whole thing was alive even while one was translating. Even though one did a dozen versions of a particular passage, it was still living. Did you get that feeling?' "Dr. Rieu replied, 'I got the deepest feeling that I possibly could have expected. It—changed me; my work changed me. And I came to the conclusion that these words bear the seal of—the Son of Man and God. And they're the Magna Charta of the human spirit.'"

J. B. Phillips concludes, "I found it particularly thrilling to hear a man who is a scholar of the first rank as well as a man of wisdom and experience openly admitting that these words written long ago were alive with power. They bore to him, as to me, the ring of truth."

Chapter 132.
Blessing before the Storm

John 10:40-42

The Bible says, "There is a time for every thing and a season for every activity under heaven" (Eccl. 3:1). There is a time to advance, regardless of the opposition, and there is a time to retreat. We see an

example of the latter in the actions of the Lord Jesus Christ that close the tenth chapter of John's Gospel.

Jesus had been in Jerusalem for some time, according to John's account. But he had not been well received there, and the time for his earthly ministry was running out. We do not know all Christ's movements during this period, but we do know that he had gone to Jerusalem from Galilee in the fall of his final year, at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2, 10), and that he had presumably been there after that for most of the winter. During these months he had preached widely and sharply, and opposition had grown, particularly on the part of the Jewish leaders. They had disliked him initially because of his views about the Sabbath. Now their dislike of him had grown into hatred and attempted murder. Once in chapter 8 and now twice in chapter 10 they have tried to kill him.

Clearly, the door to an effective ministry in Jerusalem was closing. So we read that Jesus left Jerusalem. He "went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing. There he stayed" (10:40).

It is hard to imagine an action more simple than that. Yet this decision on Christ's part is filled with lessons. For one thing, it is an illustration of the value of returning to places that have been of great blessing in our lives; for beyond the Jordan was where Christ had been baptized, John had preached, and the first disciples had followed Jesus. It was not far from the place in which Christ was tempted by the devil. For another thing, it is an illustration of the value of working at all times; for even though this was a time of retreat from Jerusalem it was not a time of inactivity.

Any one of these themes could be developed. But what I want to focus on particularly is the fact that this became a time of great spiritual blessing, so much so that we read, "and many people came to him. They said, 'Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true.' And in that place many believed in Jesus" (vv. 41-42). Driven out of Jerusalem? Yes, in a sense. But not out of a place of God's blessing. In the first chapter of the Gospel, John tells us

that the name of this place was Bethabara, which means "place of passage." This undoubtedly referred to a place where a ferry could be used to cross the river; but in these days Bethabara became a place of passage in another sense, for many passed from death to life as the result of Christ's ministry.

The storm is coming. In a short while Christ again will be in Jerusalem and this time he will be crucified. But here is blessing before the coming storm. As we look into the characteristics of this time, which led to blessing, let us pray that these might increasingly become characteristics of our own time and that blessing might follow.

A Quiet Place

We should notice, as we do this, that not every time is a time of blessing. Nor is every place. Jesus had just come from Jerusalem, and that, far from being a place of blessing, was actually a place of persecution. Are there some who have been going through a time of persecution, testing, a dark night of the soul? So did Jesus. He was not always successful in his preaching. So, do not despair. Take heart. The time is coming when night's shadows will pass and the day of blessing will dawn.

What made this time, as opposed to other times, a time in which the Spirit moved and many believed on Jesus? First, we can notice that it was a quiet time. Jerusalem was a city of great bustle and activity, as cities are. But here was a quiet spot and little activity. In Jerusalem Jesus had come to men and had preached to them, but we sense that it was a situation in which he had to fight for their attention. He used dramatic events, like crying out on the last great day of the Feast of Tabernacles as water was being poured on the altar, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37), and miracles, like the healing of the man who had been born blind. Then (we sense it, do we not?) he found his hearers quickly returning to the activities that pressed in upon them. Here, beyond the Jordan, it was different, and those who came to him came not to do things but to hear what he said and reflect upon it.

Let me encourage you to be quiet and to think of spiritual things. If you do not, how can you expect any blessing? One of the earliest preachers from whom we have any substantial writings, Chrysostom, once preached a sermon on these verses in which he commented on the fact that more women than men seem to receive Christ's teachings. Why is it? he asked. He then suggested that in his opinion it is because women for the most part are at home during the day and have time to think, while men are so often entirely caught up in the world's business. Is that true? Perhaps in part, I do not know. But I do know that there will never be blessing unless we take time to think about spiritual things.

So do it. Do it now and also throughout the week in your times of personal Bible study and prayer. Spurgeon once wrote, "Surely, heaven is worth a little thought if it is to be gained." That is certainly true of all spiritual blessings. So be quiet; wait upon God.

A Large Congregation

The second characteristic of this period is that Jesus had a large congregation. "Many people came to him," we are told. Therefore, we are not surprised to read one verse later that "many believed in Jesus."

I do not want to let this point get out of proportion, and I do not want to spend too much time on it. But at the same time I do not want to overlook the fact that Jesus often preached to large crowds. He did not neglect small numbers; in fact, his closest disciples, those with whom he worked most closely and whom he trained, numbered only twelve. But Jesus would also preach to the multitudes, and it is in times like these that we often read of great blessing. Let me state this in simple language. If God chooses to save but one or two, we are glad. If he assigns us to just a small group, we are content; for we are content to do his will, whatever it may be. But if there are no restrictions—and indeed there hardly seem to be any at this moment—then how can we be fully content or experience the fullest measure of delight unless many come to him? There is no special virtue in small numbers. There is nothing honorable in poor results. So let us have great blessing! Let us bring

many to hear the faithful preaching of God's Word, and let us have many faithful men to proclaim it.

If we are to have many converts, we must obviously have many hearers. Let us bring them to hear the Word. Whom have you brought to hear God's Word this week? this month? this year? Is there no one whom you can bring? Of course, there is! Then bring him or her, and ask God to send blessing.

A Faithful Testimony

A third feature characterized these days spent in the wilderness beyond the Jordan. It was the memory of John the Baptist's preaching. Jesus preached, but his preaching was not sowing. It was reaping because another faithful minister had sown seed before him. This was where John had preached. Many remembered his teaching and, hearing Jesus, said, "Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true" (v. 41). Oh, that this might be true for us as it has been true of others! Do we reap? It is because others have sown. Will we sow? We must, if those who follow us are also to gain a harvest.

These verses also tell us what characterized John's testimony. That is, they tell us why his testimony was fruitful.

To begin with, John *spoke of Christ.* This does not mean, you will understand, that he did not speak of other things too. John spoke to the moral corruption of his time. He rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees, when they thought to come for baptism without having truly repented of sin. He counseled priests and soldiers and many others, always giving sound biblical instruction and speaking to the times. John did and said many things, but his main work and testimony was to speak of Christ. And this is what remained in the minds of his listeners. John made it his business to speak of Christ—first, last, and always. Consequently, when others looked back on his testimony they remembered that he had taught them of Jesus.

What great preaching this was, this preaching of John. John stood on the far side of the cross and the empty tomb, but he understood what was coming and did not fail to proclaim it. He said that Jesus was the Son of God and gave this testimony, "I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God" (John 1:34). Is that in your testimony? That Christ is a man is also true. But if his humanity is taught without the addition that he is also God, there will be no blessing. John saw his divinity, rejoiced in his divinity, proclaimed his divinity. We should do so also.

Then, too, John testified that Jesus was the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Here John had the full sacrificial system of Israel in mind, and he was declaring Christ to be that Lamb sent by God of whom all the other lambs were but figures. Jesus was to die the death of the substitute. He was to die for sin, and not only for sin in general but for the sin of his people. Do you proclaim that message? You may talk about love and grace and social needs and prophecy and countless other items, all of which are good, but if the message of the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ for sin is missing, the other points will count for nothing. Christ crucified! That is the gospel. It is that which men and women remember.

We have already seen that John spoke of Christ. Notice secondly that *what he spoke about Christ was true.* This was acknowledged by those who had both heard John and met Jesus.

Here we see a great weakness in much preaching. Some preach anything but Christ. They talk of civil rights, about corruption in government, about politics, and seldom speak of Christ. But it is also true that some do speak about Jesus and yet fail in their task because they do not preach the truth concerning him. They have a limited Christ —one who is man but not God, one who died but who did not rise in triumph, one who came once but who will not come again, one who spoke in love but who will not speak out in judgment. Do not give me a Christ whittled down to man's measure. Do not throw me a truncated Jesus. I want the Christ of the Gospels—the One who is both man and God, who died but who also rose again in triumph, who came once but who is also coming again, who is love but who is also filled with wrath

against sin. In short, I want the true Jesus, preached by John and by all who are faithful in their teaching of God's Word.

Do we preach such a Christ? Are we known for such testimony? God grant that it might be said of us after we have gone and men reflect on our testimony: "He did no miracle, but all that he said about Christ was true."

John spoke of Christ. What he spoke concerning Christ was true. But then, let us also notice, *all that he spoke concerning Christ was true.* It was not merely that some of his words concerning Christ were true and that some were not. All that he spoke concerning Christ was true. Shall we strive to do less? Shall we be satisfied with facts plus error?

"No," you say. "Let us have the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

All right! But how shall we avoid error? There is only one way: by a diligent study of God's Word and a faithful adherence to it. We must not trust our own understanding. Our reasonings must be judged by this book. There is much of human opinion in Christianity in our century. God grant that such a trend might be changed, and that we might be in the vanguard of those who change it. Shall we have a slogan? Then let it be this—"Christ, the true Christ, and only Christ." And may he do the great work of drawing men and women to faith.

Results of Sound Preaching

In conclusion, let me also point out that on the occasion of Christ's ministry beyond Jordan this is precisely what happened. It was a time of blessing because (1) it was in a quiet place, (2) there was a large congregation, and (3) the work of the present was being built upon a strong testimony. But what precisely happened? Three things!

First, we are told that many *came to Jesus.* He was not in a popular place. In fact, he was in an out-of-the-way place. But there was that in

him and his message that drew people. The drawing power of the Lord is not lessened. Many may also come to him today.

Second, those who came began to *consider him* and weigh the issues. They may not have done it before. Perhaps they resisted it, because it is often hard work and because the conclusions, at least where one's opinion of oneself is concerned, are uncomfortable. But here, standing right where John had stood and thinking of his words, these people considered Christ and reached sound conclusions. John was a prophet; all men admitted that. John had pointed to Christ as the Savior and Messiah; that was common knowledge. Christ had fulfilled all John's predictions; that they also admitted. "Well, then," they concluded, "Jesus must be the Christ, and we must follow him." I wish that you might reason so soundly today. This is a matter of great importance. I dare say that if one hour ago you had received word that you were dying of cancer, your mind would be entirely taken up with that thought so that you would hardly give attention to anything else. But that would be a matter of the body only, while what I am talking about is a far more important matter of the soul. Eternity is at stake. Your destiny hangs upon your commitment to Jesus. Will you not at least think about it? Will you not at least ask yourself whether these things are so?

And do not stop there. For in the third place we notice that, not only did many come to Jesus and not only did they consider him, but many also *believed on him.* It was good to have come. It was better yet to have considered John's testimony. But neither of these was enough, for the object of the coming and of the testimony was that they might believe on Jesus, accept him as the Son of God and as the Lamb of God and then commit themselves to him on that basis. Should we not have similar results today? Should not *some* believe? Indeed, should it not be *many?*

The last verse of our text says "in that place." "In that place," we are told, "many believed in Jesus." And where was that? Obviously, where they were and without delay! Well, then, do not say, "That was an impressive discussion I just read. I must think about it." Believe on him now. Do not say, "I must pray about this." God is not calling upon you

to pray. If you are not yet a Christian, he is calling upon you to believe on Jesus.

Spurgeon once wrote on this last word of the text: "The devil wants you to wait, for he knows that he can then come and steal away the good seed of the kingdom; but if the Lord should give you the grace to decide for Him at once, if you were to believe on Jesus now, what joy there would be among the angels, and the spirit of just men made perfect! They would 'ring the bells of heaven,' and rejoice over lost ones found. What peace there would be in your own heart; and what thankfulness and delight there would be among the people of God when they heard of it."

Chapter 133.
Those Who Loved Him

John 11:1-2

The final argument against God by sinful men is that God has not done enough to convince them of the truth of his revelation. God has done much, but it is not enough. He has acted, but not sufficiently. In Christ's day the argument went, "If you are the Christ, prove it. Do a miracle great enough to convince us that you are who you claim to be." The facts on the subject are that man has sufficient evidence and, if he does not believe, it is because he will not believe, not because the evidence is lacking. In spite of this, however, we now come to the most impressive miracle in the Gospel—the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead. How are we to take it? Is this a miracle given by Jesus as one last attempt to convince his enemies that he is indeed God? If so, it was unsuccessful, for the narrative ends with an even greater determination by Christ's enemies to have him killed. Or was it performed largely out of a compassion for Christ's friends? On the surface this seems most acceptable; but if this is the case, why did Jesus delay his return to Bethany for two days, as the record indicates (v. 6)?

As we plunge into the story we find that the real motive was that "God's glory" might be revealed and that "God's Son may be glorified through it" (v. 4), in other words, precisely the motive that John gives elsewhere for the other miracles. In this case the miracle is given to reveal Christ as "the resurrection and the life." It is only incidental to this that some believe and that other hearts are hardened.

A Turning Point

Of the three friends Martha is the last one mentioned. But we begin with her; for in many senses she was the most prominent person, and the effect of the miracle on her was most pronounced. In fact, the resurrection of her brother Lazarus seems to have been a turning point in her life.

Fortunately, we know more about Martha than what is told in John 11. The information is contained in the story of a visit by Jesus to Mary and Martha's home, told in Luke 10:38-42. Jesus had gone to Bethany and was invited to the house of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus for dinner. Lazarus is not mentioned in this story, but we are told that Mary sat at Jesus' feet to learn from him while Martha was encumbered by much serving. Finally Martha began to scold. She came to where Jesus and Mary were sitting and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

Jesus answered, "Martha, Martha, you are worried about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." It is not the fact that she was serving that was the problem but that she was all worked up about it and was being unkind to others as a result. Here was *one* guest, the Lord Jesus Christ, but Martha was so worked up about his visit that she wanted Mary to leave him alone in the living room until the chores were done.

With this story in mind we now turn to another story, the story mentioned by John in the opening verses of chapter 11 but actually told by him in chapter 12. It is also told by Matthew in chapter 26, and by Mark in chapter 14. Once again the setting is Bethany, the town of

Martha and Mary, but the home is not Martha's home. It is the home of Simon, identified as "the leper" by Mark, a man who had undoubtedly been healed by Jesus. Again the occasion is a dinner party. The verses in John begin: "Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived in Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served" (John 12:1-2).

Notice two things. First of all, it was a large party. On this occasion Jesus was present with his disciples—that alone makes thirteen—and in addition to these there were Simon, Mary, Lazarus, and Martha. That is, there were seventeen, sixteen if Martha is not counted. Second, notice that once again Martha is serving but that on this occasion she does not appear in the least to be troubled but rather seems to be serving with a light spirit. On the former occasion she had one guest and was troubled. Here she has sixteen guests and is not troubled. What made the difference? Obviously only the resurrection of her brother, which comes between the two suppers, in which she learned to get her mind off herself and onto the Lord.

We are not left merely to surmise this, for there is a clue to this interpretation in the earlier story. It is the use of the pronouns "my" and "me" in her complaint to Jesus. In all they are used three times. Martha said, "Lord, don't you care that *my* sister has left *me* to do the work by myself? Tell her to help *me!*" Martha did not have her mind on Jesus at this point or even on the welfare of Mary. She had her mind on herself; and because she had her mind on herself, she felt unappreciated, neglected, and abused. Later, when she had gotten her mind off herself and onto the Lord, she lost those feelings and did what she did buoyantly.

Shall we apply that to ourselves? It is easy to do it, particularly if we are ones who (like Martha) have a gift for serving. There is nothing wrong with serving. That much is clear. So the question is not, should I or should I not serve? It is rather, whom am I serving? and how? Are you serving yourself? Are you trying to build up a reputation for yourself? Or are you serving the Lord Jesus Christ? Is your mind on him? I can assure you that if you are bothered about many things (as Martha was

bothered) or if you feel neglected, your mind is on yourself, and you need to meet afresh the One who imparts new life and who causes us to forget ourselves. If you are truly serving him, you will count such service a pleasure; and if others are not helping—well, that is all right, because you are not serving either them or yourself primarily, you are serving Christ.

A Silent Witness

This brings us to the second of these three friends—Lazarus, the man whom Christ raised from the dead. I wonder if you have noticed from your own reading of these stories that never once is it recorded, either in John or in the other Gospels, that Lazarus says anything. We see Martha talking. Mary talks. But Lazarus says nothing; he is perfectly silent. Yet, when we come to the end of the story of the supper at Simon's house, recorded in John 12, we find that Lazarus had become a great and effective witness to Jesus. For "the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him" (vv. 10-11).

How did Lazarus become such a great witness if, in fact, he said nothing? It is evident that he became a witness in the first instance by the very fact that Jesus had raised him from the dead. Everyone knew that Lazarus had died. In Christ's time funerals were public affairs and were well attended. We read several times of the crowd that had joined Martha and Mary in mourning for Lazarus and that accompanied Mary when she left the house to go to Jesus. Now Lazarus was alive, and anyone who wished could see him. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, came to Bethany and left marveling.

Moreover, Lazarus was a witness to Christ in that he was with Christ and was identified with Christ. In the story of the dinner given in the house of Simon, we are told that Lazarus "was one of them that sat at the table with him." In other words, where he was as well as what had happened to him was a testimony, for by his presence at the table he

indicated that his life was identified with the One who had accomplished his resurrection.

This, too, is easy to apply. Neither you nor I have been raised from a physical death by Jesus. But if we understand the miracles in this Gospel—which we should by now—we can understand the raising of Lazarus as an illustration of a spiritual resurrection, none the less real, in which we have all participated if we are Christians. The Bible teaches that before believing in Christ men and women are spiritually dead—"dead in transgressions and sins," as Paul indicates in his letter to the Ephesians (Eph. 2:1)—but that after believing in Christ they are made alive. If you are a Christian, you have been made alive spiritually; that is, Jesus has performed a resurrection within you. Do you give evidence of it? Do you identify yourself openly with the One who performed it, as Lazarus did?

I believe that every Christian should be able to give a verbal witness to what Jesus has done and that we should do it often. But I also recognize that not everyone gives a witness by words easily. You may be one of these. If so, God is not calling you to be a Luther, a Whitefield or a Wesley. You do not have to speak well or all the time. But you should be especially careful that your life demonstrates the reality of that resurrection that Jesus has performed in you so that others might turn to him and believe in him because of what they see.

It is possible to have a great verbal witness and yet bear little fruit because the life counts for nothing. On the other hand, it is possible to say little and yet have a deep and lasting witness because the life is itself evidence of Christ's great grace and power.

Mary Poured

Finally, we come to Mary who is, in some respects, the most delightful and rewarding character of all. We are going to be seeing more of her later in our study both of this chapter and of chapter 12. Nevertheless, even at this stage it is worth noting some of the important things about her.

For one thing, the Gospels nearly always present Mary as being at Jesus' feet. In the first of these three stories, the story that involves Martha's rebuke, we see Mary listening to Jesus and learning from him. The story says that Mary "sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said" (Luke 10:39). In John 11 we find the same thing, only here we find her expressing belief. Lazarus had died. Jesus had come and talked to Martha. Then he called for Mary, who came running at once and fell at his feet. We are told, "When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died'" (John 11:32). Earlier, when Jesus had talked to Martha, Martha had said nearly the same thing; but her words must be understood as having expressed a complaint—"Lord, if you had been here [instead of wasting time with your work beyond Jordan], my brother [would not have had to die]." Mary, however, expressed her faith: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died," implying that even then Jesus could do a miracle. Finally, we see Mary in the house of Simon, where she had just broken the alabaster box full of ointment, again at his feet, anointing his head and feet, and then wiping his feet with her hair (John 12:3).

This leads us to another thought about Mary, for if we ask why Mary anointed Christ with the ointment, the answer is that she did it in view of his coming death (John 12:7). Jesus says so himself. And this means that of all those who were with Jesus during the final months of his life only Mary understood that he was going to die for sin. Moreover, if we then ask, "But how did Mary come to know this when the others apparently failed to understand it?" The answer obviously is found in the first of the points made about her, namely, that she had spent time learning at the feet of Jesus.

The use of the ointment suggests one thing more. It suggests that because Mary understood what Jesus was about to do and because she loved him for it, she was prepared to give him her all. Two details of the story indicate this. First, the value of the ointment. This impressed everyone who was there at the dinner, for the ointment was assessed at a value of three hundred denarii, which (if we remember that one

denarius was a normal day's wage for a working man) was the equivalent of approximately thirty-five hundred dollars in our economy. We are not surprised, then, that it seemed a shocking waste to many. The second detail is that Mary broke the box that had contained the ointment. Mark tells us this (Mark 14:3). In other words, Mary gave her most valuable possession and gave it so completely that she even broke the box lest some of the precious substance should remain.

I wonder if you have given your most precious possession to the Lord Jesus Christ? Or, to put it in other words, I wonder if you have given yourself? If not—if you are holding something back—is it possible that you have never understood that he actually gave his life for you? Or, is it possible that you do not really love him above all else? I know that you may be thinking, as many do, that if you give your life to Christ, your life will be wasted. But it will not be wasted. It will be invested. Moreover, Christ, the greatest banker who ever lived, will pay great dividends.

We find one obvious dividend in Mary's story. Mary had broken her box and had poured the ointment over the head of Jesus. Some of it ran down to his feet. Then, so we read, Mary "wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume" (John 12:3). But why was the house filled with the perfume? It could have drifted about naturally, I suppose. On the other hand, if Mary had wiped Christ's feet with her hair and if she moved about, then the odor may well have spread through the house because of her. That is, it clung to her and spread from her. If this is so, then it indicates that in giving her all to Christ, Mary had become identified with Christ and had become a blessing.

A Memorial

This message can be applied by a series of questions. Here were three persons, all different, yet all were affected by their close contact with Jesus Christ. Are you like them? Have you been likewise affected?

First, there is Martha. Martha served. This was her special function, and she did it well. But initially she served for what it would do for Martha and only later did she learn to do it for Christ. Are you like her in her second condition? When you work for the Lord, are your eyes really on Jesus? Second, there is Lazarus. Lazarus only sat. But where he sat mattered, and what he stood for mattered. Are you like him? Can others see that you are with Jesus and that he has changed you? Are you among his resurrected ones? Finally, there is Mary. Martha served. Lazarus sat. But Mary poured. She poured out the perfume of her life and so became a blessing. Are you like her? Have you broken your box? Have you poured out your all upon him?

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, who tells this story far better than I have in one of his radio sermons, concludes at this point by asking whether you, the listener or reader, have experienced the joy of being at the feet of Jesus. "If not," he observes, "the difficulty is that you have kept your perfume sealed in a box. You have not poured it out at the feet of Jesus Christ. What is your perfume? Your perfume is a surrendered life. Only when you break your box and pour out your life upon him, only then will your life cease to be narrow and ingrown, and only then will you cease to clutch your perfume and say, 'But this is mine! This is mine!' When you break the box and give it all and anoint his feet, the whole house will be filled with the fragrance of the ointment, and you will know what it is to be in the glory of the presence of Christ."

Jesus said that what Mary had done would be remembered throughout the whole world as "in memory of her" (Mark 14:9). There are many kinds of memorials—monuments, buildings, books, tombstones. But the greatest is to be remembered as one who gave everything to the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 134.
He Who Loved Them

John 11:3

We have already looked at the characters who figure in the eleventh chapter of John's Gospel— Martha, Mary, and Lazarus—and we have learned something from them. The story begins, however, not with their past associations with Jesus nor even with expectation of their future blessings, which we have considered. It begins with a problem. The problem is that Lazarus was dying.

This is a problem with which we can all identify, for either it has come to us already or it will at some future time. In this life most people develop at least some close relationships—family relationships or friendships. We prize these highly. We would give anything to maintain them. Still from time to time the natural calamities of life intrude into our happiness, and we find our closest friends wrenched from us by accidents, sickness, and eventually death. Death takes the father of a young family. A mother is taken. A spiritual counselor or leader is taken from us just at the moment when we feel that we most need his presence and advice. One who has been most useful is laid aside by a lingering illness. In such moments some question the presence or love of God. Others, even those who do not doubt God's love and faithfulness, find their faith tested.

What are we to think in such circumstances? What should we do? There is probably not a better example of what we are to do in the entire Bible than the example given to us by Martha and Mary at the beginning of our story. It is simply that the sisters told Jesus of their problem. We are told that "his sisters sent word to Jesus, 'Lord, the one you love is sick'" (v. 3). That they did this is significant. How they did it is even more significant.

Beloved, Yet Afflicted

Before we look at the way in which Martha and Mary approached Jesus, however, we need to notice an obvious point, for it is often forgotten. The point is simply that even those whom Jesus especially loves get sick and eventually die. When the sisters approached Jesus, they did so

on the basis of his love for Lazarus. They loved Jesus; his love for them was even greater. Nevertheless, Lazarus was sick and failing. The Greek word that John uses here (there are two principle words for "sick" in Greek) implies that he was "deathly sick" or "sinking." In other words, we are to learn from this that sickness in a believer is in no way incompatible with the Lord's love for him.

It may be that Mary and Martha, knowing as little of God's ways at this point in their lives as many Christians seem to know today, were surprised that someone whom Jesus loved could be sick. There is just a suggestion of this surprise in the word "behold." But they need not and should not have been surprised.

In the first place, they need not have been surprised for the simple reason that the man whom
Jesus loves is after all *still just a man.* It is in the nature of being a man to suffer bodily ailments. In one excellent sermon on this text Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote, "The love of Jesus does not separate us from the common necessities and infirmities of human life. Men of God are still men. The covenant of grace is not a charter of exemption from consumption, or rheumatism, or asthma." So let us learn from this and not be surprised when we ourselves or those we love suffer illness. The Bible says (in the words of one of Job's "comforters"): "Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). It also says with absolute clarity, "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

Moreover, we should not be surprised at illness, for we know that it often is God's way of speaking to our hearts and of leading us on in the Christian life. That is, it often is *used by God for our good.* Many have known this. David knew it, for he wrote in one of the psalms, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees" (Ps. 119:71). Sickness helped him to love and understand the Scriptures. Elizabeth Prentiss, the hymn writer, apparently felt that it had helped her to love Christ more. She wrote:

Let sorrow do
its work, Send
grief and pain;

Sweet are thy
messengers,
Sweet their
refrain,
When they can sing with me,
More love, O Christ, to thee,
More love to thee,
More love to thee!

So it has been for thousands who have been tested. Sickness has been a trial. But it has been a trial that was used by God for good. We know, do we not, that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28)?

We should also note that sickness in us is also sometimes *used by God for the good of others.* For this reason too we should not be surprised by it. This point does not need to be elaborated here, for we will come to it again farther on in the chapter. But it is obvious that this is what is involved when Jesus says as he later does, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory, so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (v. 4). If God is glorified by a Christian's illness, then the illness is for God's good and for the good of all who see this particular demonstration of his glory. In the case of Lazarus, to give just one example, for twenty centuries believers have been getting good from it; and even today, as we study it, we are the richer because the beloved brother of Mary and Martha died.

Our Help in Trouble

That we should not be surprised at sickness and death does not mean, however, that we are to desire sickness. Nor does it mean that we cannot tell Jesus of our desire to have the sick one made well. At this

point the words of the two sisters provide an example to us of what we may do in sickness and of how we may pray about it.

Notice, in the first place, that the sisters did pray. Or, as we should more properly say in their case, they brought the matter to Jesus. It is always good to bring troubles to Jesus. In fact, it is good to be always in communication with him about everything.

Do we act as they did? Arthur W. Pink observes on this text, "It is written, 'God is our refuge and strength, a very *present* help in trouble' (Ps. 46:1); yet, to our shame, how little we *know* Him as such. When the people murmured against Moses, we are told that, 'he cried unto the Lord' (Exod. 15:25). When Hezekiah received the threatening letter from Rabshakeh, he 'spread it before the
Lord' (Isa. 37:14). When John the Baptist was beheaded, his disciples 'went and told Jesus' (Matt. 14:12). What examples for us! We have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. No, he is full of compassion, for when on earth he, too, was 'acquainted with grief.' He sympathizes deeply with his suffering people, and invites them to pour out the anguish of their hearts before Him." Mary and Martha showed great wisdom in acquainting Jesus with their problem. And so do we, when we do likewise. True, Jesus already knows our problem. He knows everything about us. Still, he invites us to come to tell him and to receive that heart-relief which only he is capable of giving.

God's Love

This leads us, however, to the second characteristic of the sisters' prayer: the basis of their appeal. What was the basis of their appeal? Was it that they had often had Jesus in their home and that he therefore owed them something? No. Was it that they had served him faithfully and had been true to him when others of the disciples had dropped away? No. Was it that they loved him? No. The basis of the appeal was that he loved them. That is, it was in God's love rather than in the love of man that they took refuge.

There is no comfort in the reverse. Suppose for a minute that their appeal had been that they or Lazarus had loved Jesus. That would have been true at least in part, for they did love him. But if they had appealed on that basis, they would soon have been asking, "But have we loved him enough? Has our love been a pure love? Have we offended him?" and the honest answers to those questions would have thrown them into a morass of self-doubt. But this is not what they did. They did love him, but they knew that their love for Jesus would never in a million years be an adequate basis for their appeal. So their appeal was not that they loved him, but that he loved them. He had loved them freely, when there was nothing in them to commend them to him. He had loved them faithfully, when they were faithless. He had loved them with an everlasting love as, indeed, only God can love. This, then, was the basis. Indeed, it is the only grounds that any of us can ever have in approaching the Almighty.

Moreover, in coming to Jesus in this way, the sisters came, not seeking their own will but rather the will of Jesus. For one thing, they did not actually make a request. I do not think that it is fair to say on this basis that no request was implied. Clearly there was the implication that they would like Jesus to come to their aid, and there was certainly the suggestion that he might help them by healing Lazarus. If this is not implied, there was no point even in sending Christ the message. But at the same time, we cannot miss feeling that when they phrased the report as they did—"Lord, the one you love is sick"—they indicated by the form of it that they were seeking his will rather than theirs in the matter.

I wonder if you do that in your prayers. It is not so much the words you use—I am sure you understand that. It is the desire of your heart. Certainly you would like the trouble removed, the sick one healed. But is that your fundamental desire? Or is it that God's will might be done regardless of the outcome? It is only when we pray in the latter way that we are enabled to make our requests so known unto God that "the peace of God that passes all understanding" keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

"It Is Well with My Soul"

Moreover, we need that peace of mind if only because God does not always act in the way we think he should act, or when.

Nothing is clearer than this from the story. No doubt when Mary and Martha first acquainted Jesus with the fact of Lazarus's sickness, they looked to see him recover as soon as the messenger reached Jesus. Or else they expected Jesus to come immediately to their aid. But neither happened. Instead of getting better, Lazarus became worse and died. Instead of coming, Jesus tarried for two more days and then arrived in Bethany at least a full four days after their brother's death. From this we learn that Jesus may be completely informed of our trouble and yet act as though he were indifferent to it. We learn that prayer for the sick may not be answered. Indeed, if this were not the case, no one would ever become sick or die so long as he had a friend or relative to pray for him.

No, the comfort in our prayers is not in the fact that Jesus always answers them as we wish. For he does not. It is that he, who made us and controls all circumstances, knows best and is well able to direct even sickness and death to his glory.

Do you object, "But that is easy to say in the case of Lazarus, for God raised him from the dead. That was obviously to his glory"? But shall we not be raised? Is Jesus not the resurrection and the life to us also? The story says, "Your brother will rise again." Then so he shall, and so shall we all. Thy brother shall rise again. Thy sister shall rise again. Thy mother shall rise again. Thy father shall rise again. Thy children shall rise again.

In the year 1873, a Christian lawyer from Chicago, named Horatio Spafford, placed his wife and four children on the luxury liner *Ville de Havre* sailing from New York to France. Spafford expected to join them in about three or four weeks after finishing up some business, but with the exception of his wife he never saw them again. The trip started out beautifully. But on the evening of November 21, 1873, as the *Ville de Havre* proceeded peacefully across the Atlantic, the ship was suddenly

struck by another vessel, the *Lochearn*, and sank a mere thirty minutes later, with the loss of nearly all on board.

On being told that the ship was sinking Mrs. Spafford knelt with her children and prayed that they might be saved or be made willing to die, if such was God's will. A few minutes later, in the confusion, three of the children were swept away by the waves while she stood clutching the youngest. Suddenly the youngest child was swept from her arms. She reached out and caught the baby's gown. Then the baby, a little girl, was lost again. Mrs. Spafford became unconscious and awoke later to find that she had been rescued by sailors from the *Lochearn*. But the four children were gone.

Back in the United States Horatio Spafford was waiting for news of his family, and at last, ten days later (after the rescue ship had reached Cardiff), it came. "Saved alone" was his wife's message. That night Spafford walked the floor of his room in anguish, as anyone would have done. But this was not all. For as he shared his loss with his Lord, a loss that could not be reversed in this life, he found, as many have, that peace that indeed passes all understanding. Toward morning he told a friend named Major Whittle, "I am glad to be able to trust my Lord when it costs me something." Then, sometime later, as he reflected on the disaster at sea, he wrote:

When peace, like a river,
attendeth my way, When
sorrows like sea-billows roll;
Whatever my lot, thou hast
taught me to say, It is well,
it is well with my soul.
Though Satan should buffet, though
trials should come, Let this blest
assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my
helpless estate, And has shed
his own blood for my soul.

My sin—O the bliss of his
glorious thought!— My sin,
not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross and I bear
it no more; Praise the Lord,
praise the Lord, O my soul!
O Lord, haste the day when the faith
shall be sight, The clouds be rolled
back as a scroll,
The trump shall resound and the Lord
shall descend; "Even so"—it is well
with my soul.

The text tells us that Jesus loved Lazarus, as he also loved Martha and Mary. Does Jesus, in a special sense, love you? Are you aware of that love? You say, "But how can I be?" I will tell you how. You can know it if you love him; for we are told, "We love because he first loved us." Do you love him? Is there that love-bond that is evidence of the fact that you are one of his sheep, one of those for whom he died? If there is, then let me encourage you to live in a way that demonstrates the reality and depth of his love. If you are well, serve him vigorously. If you are sick, let the world see how you are able to glorify God in your sickness.

On the other hand, if you are not aware of that love, learn that you are without the brightest and most cheering love in the entire universe and begin to seek God. Do not pass into the next world without the love of the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 135.
A Sickness Not unto Death

John 11:4

Everyone wants to know how a story will end, at least if the story is a good one. Children will say to their mothers, as their mothers are

reading a bedtime story, "Don't stop now, Mother. Read just one more chapter. I want to know what's going to happen next." Adults will stay buried in a book until they finish it or will stay glued to a television screen until a program ends. The same characteristic also works to keep us reading the daily newspaper until the latest political scandal fades away, the war ends, or the election results are finally tabulated.

Obviously, men and women also have this desire where their own personal stories are concerned, and this accounts for the eternal popularity of fortune-tellers (all ages have had them), oracles, mystics, futurologists, and even the kind of journalistic pundit who is not afraid to announce in print where the world is headed. Unfortunately, as those who follow such leads often discover, men do not know the future. So it is impossible to find out what will happen to us tomorrow or next week, not to mention what will happen to us at life's end. Many who do not know what is coming, therefore, fear the future and shrink from it.

Does anyone know how your life story will end? Surely no *human* knows. But there is One who does know. God knows. In this text Jesus, who is God, referred to a situation in which a friend of his was dying and he announced the outcome. Moreover, it was a good outcome. The text says, "When he heard this [that his friend Lazarus was sick] Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory, that God's Son may be glorified through it" (John 11:4). As we read the story we discover that by the time Jesus had received the message Lazarus had probably already died. So Jesus was actually announcing that the final outcome was to be a demonstration of the glory of God through his resurrection.

Only God Knows

The place to begin with this verse is with the fact that God does know the future—as I have already said—and that only God knows it. Furthermore, because he knows and because he loves us and is concerned for us, he delights to reveal at least parts of that future to us.

Think of the Book of Isaiah, for instance. In the center section of that book, in a series of chapters dealing with the nonvalidity of the pagan gods (chapters 40-48), God taunts the idols on the basis of their inability to tell the future. In one place he says this: "Present your case. ... Set forth your arguments. ...Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things [that is, what did happen] were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come, tell us what the future holds, so we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear. But you are less than nothing and your works are utterly worthless; he who chooses you is detestable" (Isa. 41:21-24). The point of this passage is that no one but God can tell the future because no one but God controls it. And the fact that he does tell it is one of the proofs that he alone is the true God.

God does not only reveal the future to demonstrate that he is God, however, though this is one reason. He also does it to warn the ungodly of judgment and to encourage those who are his own.

We find this thought as early in the Bible as the third chapter of Genesis. God had placed the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden and had warned them of death if they should eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree. They ate. So, when God came to them, he came with words of judgment that were, nevertheless, at the same time words of promise. He told of years of hardship—pain for the woman in childbearing and toil for the man as he would work to earn a living. But the same words also told of the coming of One who would eventually destroy the works of Satan. "He will crush your head," he said to the serpent, "and you will strike his heel" (Gen. 3:15). The promise so captivated Eve that she named her first son Cain, meaning (in a very rough translation), "Here he is," because she thought (wrongly) that Cain was the one whom God had promised to send.

In Hosea we find the same thing. God used the story of Hosea's life to illustrate the pending judgment upon and scattering of the children of Israel—the symbolic names of his three children were to indicate this future: "Scattered," "Not-Pitied," "Not-My-People." At the same time

God told of the blessing that would come after the scattering, thereby encouraging those who would have to live through the years of chastisement. We read at the beginning of the story (but as a description of the end), "Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God'" (Hosea 1:10).

The Glory of God

Having established this background, then—the background that God foretells the future in order (1) to demonstrate his power to control it, (2) to warn the unsaved, and (3) to encourage believers—return to the text in which Jesus foretold the outcome of the sickness of Lazarus, saying that it would be for the glory of God and that he might be glorified by it.

First, Jesus said that the outcome would be glorifying to God. Notice that while this was true— we are going to see in a moment how it was true—it was not true in the way that the sisters might naturally have expected. I suppose that Christ's words were immediately reported back to Martha and Mary and that they came about twenty-four hours after Lazarus had passed away. I can picture the sisters saying, "But Jesus is mistaken. If he had been here earlier, he might have cured our brother; that would have been glorifying to God. But now Lazarus is dead, and it is too late. At any rate, if any glory is to come of this it will have to be at the time of the final resurrection, and by that time we will all be gone. So far as we are concerned, it is too late." It would have been natural for them to have thought in this manner; but if they did, it was wrong. In fact, the outcome, though different from their plans, was actually going to result in far more glory to God than they could ever have imagined.

The resurrection of Lazarus was itself glorifying to God. That much is obvious. To glorify God means to acknowledge him as being who he truly is; and, since one of God's attributes is omnipotence, clearly the

resurrection of Lazarus caused many to acknowledge that great power and so glorify him.

At the same time, however, the glory of God was seen in an even greater sense in the changed lives of those who either took part in or witnessed the miracle. We see the effect on Lazarus, for instance, as we pointed out in the first study of John 11. Nowhere in the entire story are we told that Lazarus said anything. But we are told toward the end of the story that he became a great witness (vv. 10-11). How did this happen? We know that when a man comes to the place where he is going to die, especially if he is a spiritual man, it has an effect on him. So when Lazarus died and rose again, undoubtedly he emerged as one who had experienced a profound transformation and who showed it by his demeanor. Have you been changed? You will be when you come to the place where you have died to self and have been made alive unto Christ, when you have truly become "a new creation" in him. In this, though you may have to suffer greatly, the end (as Christ says) will be to God's glory.

The resurrection also had an effect on the sisters. We saw some of this also in the earlier study. Before it, Martha had been a scold when she was serving just one guest. Afterward she served a whole houseful of people gracefully.

And Mary? Mary came to understand that Jesus was going to give his life so that all the Marys, Marthas, and Lazaruses of this world might not have to die spiritually but might instead enter into newness of life and enjoy an eternity of God's blessing in heaven. Mary indicated this when she anointed Christ's head with the ointment, for Jesus said that she did it in anticipation of his death and burial.

Notice, too, that the death and resurrection of Lazarus had an effect on the disciples and that this was God-glorifying. We are not told in so many words, at least after the miracle, what the effect was. But before it, when Jesus was explaining to them what he was about to do, he said, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe" (vv. 1415).

Taken by itself, the first half of that second sentence is astounding: "Lazarus is dead, and ... I am glad."

"Glad?" we say. "Lazarus dead and Jesus glad? How can that be?" But then we read on and find Jesus saying, in effect, "Do not be surprised at my saying, and do not be dismayed at circumstances. Nothing ever happens to you that I have not first approved, and nothing is approved from which I have not previously appointed good results. Lazarus has died. Yes. The sisters are sorrowing. Yes. But the end will be good, even for you. For in your case the outcome will be a strengthening of faith in me, and you will influence thousands."

Learn from this for the times when trouble comes to you. Do not complain. But take this message seriously. Say, "Lord, I do not see it; but I know that this trouble may have come upon me for the sake of some friend. So use it that way, if it so pleases you. And help me to trust you and grow through the experience."

In the fourth place, notice that the death and resurrection of Lazarus had an effect on the immediate friends of the family. Here Donald Grey Barnhouse, who has developed this sequence well, observes, "Since they were a large family, they had many friends. In John 11:19, it says, 'Many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.' These were the family friends. We know that whenever there is a death, the friends gather around the family. As an act of courtesy, friends send flowers, they go to the viewing, they shake hands with the loved ones and express sympathy. This is a part of our lives, and it was a part of their lives. And what happened? It says in verse 45, 'Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.' They came to sympathize, and they remained to believe. So the effect of Lazarus' death now is seen in the family friends.

"We go a little further still to the acquaintances when the Lord Jesus Christ reaches the tomb site of Lazarus. As He's praying He says, 'Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always; but, because of the people which stand by'—that

would be the curiosity seekers—'I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me' (John 11:41-42). Here was a circle of people just standing by. They knew that Lazarus was dead. They knew that Jesus had come. Many of them were 'the' important people of the community." Did these people believe? Some did. Others apparently did not. We are told that these merely "went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done" (John 11:46).

To these last unbelievers Lazarus's resurrection was in the nature of a condemnation; for, though it was irrefutable evidence of Christ's power, they would not accept it, and it therefore increased their guilt. Even here, however, God was glorified. For he has been patient in demonstrating his great love and power to sinners.

Jesus Glorified

We return to the text and find there a last phrase that deserves consideration. Jesus had said that the sickness of Lazarus was not unto death in the final sense but rather that it was for God's glory. He then added, and "that God's Son may be glorified through it." How was Jesus glorified by Lazarus's death? There are two obvious answers and one that is not so obvious.

First, since Jesus is God, obviously anything that brings honor to God the Father brings honor to him also. This is made clear if we compare John 2:11, the verse that concludes the account of Christ's first miracle, with John 11:40, a verse that aptly sums up this one. In the former verse we are told, "This, the first of his miraculous signs Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed *his glory."* In the latter we discover him saying to Martha, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the *glory of God?"* Christ's glory and God's glory! They are one and the same, for Christ is God. Therefore, "All may honor the Son just as they honor the Father" (John 5:23).

Second, Jesus was glorified in that the death and resurrection of Lazarus revealed him as One who is able to deal with any situation. The story tells us that Jesus delayed his return to Bethany until Lazarus had died

and had been buried four days. In other words, Jesus got himself into a predicament. But he got himself into a predicament only so that he might get himself out. On this point Barnhouse writes: "I quite believe that God does that with everyone of us—all the time. That is the Lord's way. If God wants you to trust in Him, He puts you in a place of difficulty. If He wants you to trust Him greatly, He puts you in a place of impossibility. For when a thing is impossible, then we who are so prone to move things through by the force of our own being can say, 'Lord, it has to be you. I am utterly, absolutely nothing.'... And the Lord [will say], 'It is for you that this happened, for your disciples, for your family, for your friends, for your acquaintances and the bystanders, but it's also for me; it's for me.' And God is saying. 'I am in the midst of an invisible war. The repercussions of what I am doing will be known in eternity.'"

Finally, there is a point that is not so obvious. Jesus, so he himself said, was to be glorified by what was to come. But what was to come was not only the resurrection of Lazarus; it was also the cross, to which the term "glorify" often refers in John's Gospel. Think of John 7:39, for instance. There we are told that the Spirit had not been given at this time because "Jesus was not yet glorified," that is, had not yet died. Or again, when the Greeks come to him, as recorded in the next chapter, Jesus declares, "The hour is come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23). It is obvious that he is thinking of his death in this passage, for he immediately goes on to speak of the corn of wheat that must fall into the ground and die. In the same way, just a few verses earlier, we read that the disciples did not understand these things at first but "after Jesus was glorified [that is, had been crucified and had risen again] ... they realized that these things had been written about him" (v. 16).

The raising of Lazarus was to result in Christ's death, therefore. And it did. This was the final spark needed to explode the accumulated hostility of the leaders against him and to propel them toward the ultimate sacrilege. As for Jesus, he foresaw the outcome and still moved toward it.

You may be saying, "I understand from this story that the ills of this life are no accident for the one who is a true child of God; and I am pleased that God, who knows the future, has chosen to reveal the outcome to me. But it is still hard to suffer." Yes, it is always hard to suffer. But the Lord Jesus Christ went through it all before us. He asks us to suffer. Indeed, he ordains it. But he does not ask us to do anything that he has not done first. Nor does he ask us to suffer without at the same time promising to go with us through the testing. The fact that he has done it is itself an encouragement. He died, yet rose again. He suffered, but he triumphed gloriously.

And so shall we. This present sickness—whatever it may be—is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified by it.

Chapter 136.
The Delays of Love

John 11:5-6

I wonder if you have ever noticed in your study of the fourth Gospel that the disciple whom Jesus loved—John, the author of the Gospel (John 21:20, 24)—is not at all reluctant to record that Jesus loved others also. Already we have been told that Jesus loved Lazarus. Now, in verse 5, we find that he also loved Martha and Mary, Lazarus's sisters. The verse says, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."

The interesting thing about these statements concerning Christ's love is that they are given in a context that might cause us to doubt them—at least if we did not know better. We have already seen one such context and are about to see another. The problem we have seen lies in the fact that Lazarus was sick, in spite of the fact that Jesus loved him and could heal him. On the surface this seems difficult to accept, just as it sometimes is difficult to accept sickness or death when they enter into our experience. "If Jesus really loves us, how can he let this happen?" is

the question we ask. In looking at that problem we saw some answers and learned that sickness and death are not incompatible with Christ's love.

But we have another problem at this point. No sooner are we told that "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" than we also find the report, "When he [Jesus] heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days" (v. 6). This means that Jesus delayed his return to Bethany rather than immediately rushing either to help Lazarus or comfort the sisters. Moreover, we are to understand that the delay was in some sense connected with his love for these friends and flowed from it. How can this be? If we were in Christ's place, we would immediately have returned to Bethany—or at least we acknowledge that this is what we should do if we were in these circumstances. Yet Jesus does not. He stays where he is. It is only after two days that he finally does go back to Bethany, arriving there four full days after Lazarus's burial.

Here, then, is a text for careful study, particularly if we have ever experienced God's delay—in answering our prayers, showing us the path we should take, removing a difficulty, or some such thing. Does God delay? Yes, he does. But he delays always for a purpose.

In developing this text I am following a three-point outline given to it years ago by Alexander Maclaren of Manchester, England: (1) Christ's delays are the delays of love, (2) the delayed help always comes at the right time, and (3) the best help is not delayed. The discussion is mine, but the points are from Maclaren's excellent exposition.

Because of Love

To begin with, Christ's delays are the delays of love. If the verse teaches anything, it teaches this; for the point is that Jesus stayed where he was for two days *because* he loved them. We may not understand this. We cannot see the end from the beginning, as God can; therefore, we cannot see how Christ's delays contribute to an overall plan. Moreover, in the grief that we sometimes have we often cannot see clearly, even though God might have made his plan clear. It is hard to see through eyes filled

with tears. The point, however, is that even though we cannot see how the situation will end or why it has come upon us, we can know that it flows from Christ's love and is controlled by it. Christ's delays are the delays of love. Therefore, his delays are to be interpreted in the light of his love and not the other way around.

This truth suggests several related points. First, if Christ's delays are the delays of love, then they are not the delays of *indifference.* He does not delay because he does not care.

We recognize that delays often flow from indifference in human affairs. In fact, Jesus once told a story based on this principle (see Luke 18:1-8). It concerned a judge and a widow. The judge was a hard man who lived for himself and who feared neither God nor man. The widow was the victim of injustice. She came to the judge with her case, but he refused to hear her. There was nothing in it for him. But because the widow persisted, the judge eventually rendered justice, reasoning that it was better to act and be done with the case than to be wearied with the widow's unending requests. Jesus concluded, "Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?" (v. 7). The story does not mean that God is like the unjust judge, of course; its point lies rather in the contrast. But the story does recognize that God sometimes delays in answering a particular prayer and that in human affairs this often is the product of indifference. It teaches that indifference is never a characteristic of God.

Second, if Christ's delays are the delays of love, then they are not the product of a *preoccupation* on Christ's part. That is, he does not delay his answer because he is too busy to deal with our problem.

There is a story in the Old Testament in which the pagan gods are contrasted with the true God on just this point. It concerns Elijah. Elijah was troubled with the apostasy of Israel in a day when the majority of the people had become worshipers of Baal. So he challenged Ahab the king and the king's prophets, the prophets of Baal, to a contest. The prophets were to prepare an altar upon which a bull was to be sacrificed; Elijah was to do likewise. In each case there was to be an

altar, wood, and a sacrifice, but no fire. The true God was to provide fire. The 450 prophets of Baal built their altar, made their sacrifice, and then began to call on Baal to send fire. Nothing happened. They began to cry louder. Still nothing happened. Finally, they began to throw themselves upon the altar and even cut themselves with knives. Although they kept it up for the better part of the day, no flame descended.

At this point, Elijah began to mock them over the supposed preoccupation of their god. "Perhaps he is busy," he said. His actual words were, "Shout louder! Surely he is a god [that is, at least you say he is a god]. Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy [this phrase is even a bit racy, for it means that perhaps Baal is busy in the bathroom], or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened" (1 Kings 18:27). Obviously, nothing happened. Baal was unable to respond to his worshipers. At last, after they had given up, Elijah called upon his God, Jehovah; and Jehovah, who is never preoccupied, responded with a fire that consumed not only the sacrifice but also the wood and stones and lapped up twelve barrels of water that Elijah had caused to be poured upon them.

We learn from such stories that the delays of God are never the delays of indifference or of preoccupation. They are the delays of love.

Love and Circumstances

To say that Christ's delays are the delays of love is also to say something positive, however. His delays are purposeful. Love has a purpose. Therefore, we are right to seek purposes in God's delays. I must confess that it would be presumptuous to pretend to be able to say always and in detail what God's purposes are. His ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. We cannot see the end from the beginning, as he can. Still, we can look for purposes. And we can suggest, at least in general terms, what some of them might be.

For instance, one of the goals reached by God through his delays is that of molding our errant wills to conform to his perfect will. When God

answers us immediately, it often is the case that we then rush on to formulate our own plans for whatever comes next. When God delays, by contrast, we are forced to ask, "Am I right in what I am trying to do? Do I have the will of the Lord on this matter? Does he have more to teach or tell me than I have heard?" An example of such a purpose is seen in God's dealings with the people of Israel during the days of their desert wanderings; for God kept them in the wilderness for forty years, teaching them obedience, until they had become the kind of disciplined fighting force he was going to use one day to conquer Canaan.

Another of God's purposes in delays is to strengthen faith. Our faith does not grow much if we always get an immediate response, though we might think that it would. Rather, our faith grows when we are forced to wait, trusting that God knows what he is doing and that he will fulfill his promises toward us eventually and in the proper time. Abraham's faith grew in this manner. God had promised him a son through whom he was to have a great posterity; but Abraham grew old —in fact, he was nearly a hundred years old—before the son came. What happened to his faith during these long years? Did it weaken and die? Not at all. On the contrary, the years of delay were the years in which Abraham's faith grew most—so much so that at the age of ninetynine he was willing to change his name from Abram which means "father of many," to Abraham, which means "father of a multitude," as a sign of his faith in the promise of God concerning the son who even then was not given. It was in the year following this that Isaac was born.

God uses delays to mold our wills and strengthen our faith. May I suggest one thing more?
Sometimes he also does it simply to bring honor to his own name and to honor Jesus (v. 4).
Those who do not know Jesus may find this puzzling or even offensive. I have heard people say, "What kind of God is he who has to be honored?" But those who know him do not find this puzzling. Jesus is glorious. Consequently, to honor him is the only proper and desirable

thing to do. In their best moods, Christians rejoice that God is able to honor himself through their circumstances.

Let me summarize this in a challenge that I hope you will remember. *Learn to interpret circumstances by the love of Christ and not Christ's love by circumstances.* Christ's delays are the delays of love; therefore, they should be interpreted by love. If we do it the other way around, we will be even farther from understanding the circumstances, and we may question the love. Begin with Christ's love. Say, "I know that Christ loves me. He died for me. Therefore I will do my best to see his purpose in the things that are happening." If you do that, you will begin to interpret circumstances in the light of love; and, as God gives light, you will begin to see how he is using them to perfect your will, strengthen your faith, and bring glory to his own wonderful name.

Help in God's Time

The second point that Maclaren makes is that the delayed help always comes at the right time. He writes: "Do not ... forget that Heaven's clock is different from ours. In our day there are twelve hours, and in God's a thousand years. What seems long to us is to Him 'a little while.' [Therefore] let us not imitate the shortsighted impatience of His disciples, who said, 'What is this that he saith, A little while? We cannot tell what he saith.' The time of separation looked so long in anticipation to them, and to him it had dwindled to a moment. For two days, eight-and-forty hours, he delayed his answer to Mary and Martha, and they thought it an eternity, while the heavy hours crept by, and they only said, 'It's very weary; he cometh not.' ...How long did it look to them when they got Lazarus back?"

No, we must not judge God's actions by our conception of time. We must learn that he always acts immediately and decisively when the time is right.

We have an illustration of God's mastery of time and circumstances in the deliverance of Peter from prison following his arrest by King Herod. Herod had killed James, the brother of John; and, since this had pleased the leaders of the people, Herod planned to kill Peter also. The church

prayed. But while they prayed Peter still remained in prison. He had been imprisoned before the Passover, and Herod intended to kill him after it. So for at least seven days the Christians were praying, during which time God delayed. Each day went by, one by one, until it was the night before Peter's pending execution. The time was up. But that night, not a moment too soon or too late, the angel entered the prison and freed Peter.

Moreover, the liberation was done deliberately. Nothing was hurried. It is true that when the angel appeared the chains immediately fell off Peter's hands and the gates swung open. But there was no hurry. Instead, Peter was told to put on his sandals. The angel waited while he did so. Then he was told to throw his robe about him. After that the angel and Peter simply walked out of the prison, past the guards and into the streets.

Again let me quote Maclaren. "God is never in haste. He never comes too soon or too late. 'The Lord shall help them, and that right early.' Sennacherib's army is round the city, famine is within the walls. Tomorrow will be too late. But tonight the angel strikes, and the enemies are all dead men. So God's delay makes the deliverance the more signal and joyous when it is granted. And though hope deferred may sometimes make the heart sick, the desire, when it comes is a tree of life"

No Delays

We have one more point to our study. We have seen that Christ's delays are the delays of love. We have seen that the delayed help always comes at the right time. Notice finally that the best help is never delayed.

The principle we have been looking at is an important principle. But we need to notice that at best it applies to only one half—and not even the most important half—of our prayers to God and of God's answers. We ask for some things in which God delays. He delays guidance, healing, the changing of circumstances, and so on. But in the most important things—those that concern spiritual help, growth, salvation, and blessing—there is no delay. Rather in these the help comes instantly. We might say that if the text for the former circumstances is the one we have been studying—"He stayed where he was two more days"—then the text for the latter is Isaiah 65:24—"Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear." If you are praying for spiritual help, insight, salvation, or a deeper relationship to God, then you can be sure that God hears you and that he is moving even now to meet your need.

Here again Peter becomes our example. Do you remember that scene in which Peter saw the Lord Jesus Christ walking toward him over the water, approaching the boat in which Peter was riding? Peter was sometimes cowardly, but he was sometimes brave, too. So when he saw Jesus he reasoned that if Jesus could walk on the water, then by the power of Jesus, Peter could walk on the water also. "Lord," he said, "if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." Jesus said, "Come." So Peter got down out of the boat and began to walk toward Jesus.

The sea was in turmoil. There had been a storm. Soon Peter began to look at the waves rather than at Jesus. He began to lose faith; when he began to lose faith, he became afraid and began to sink. "Lord, save me," he cried. We then read—this is beautiful—"*Immediately* Jesus reached out his hand and caught him ... and when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down" (Matt. 14:30-32). Immediately! This was no time for delays. Help was needed, and help came instantly.

Let us learn these great lessons: (1) If God delays, it is because he has a purpose in his delays, and (2) when we need help immediately, he is there and helps instantly. Moreover, in that help we always find what we most need.

Chapter 137.
Christ's Disciples Tested

John 11:7-10

Years ago, when I was growing up in an evangelical Sunday school, I learned a bit of doggerel that expresses a great truth. It goes like this:

> Only one life! 'Twill soon be past; Only what's done for Christ will last.

The lines are not much as poetry. Nevertheless, the thoughts they contain are good, and they deserve attention. Life is short. Time is valuable. How we spend our time is important. These thoughts lie behind the verses to which we now come in our verse-by-verse exposition of John's Gospel.

Jesus had delayed for two days after learning from Mary and Martha that their brother Lazarus was sick. "Then he said to his disciples, 'Let us go back to Judea.' 'But Rabbi,' they said, 'a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you; and yet you are going back there?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light in him'" (11:7-10).

Time Matters

In approaching these verses we must remember that they occur in a Gospel that shows an unusual interest in time. We noticed this first in

the opening chapters. There John presents the first great opening week of Christ's ministry, noting in a series of seven significant days how John the Baptist first denied that he himself was the Messiah, how he pointed to Jesus, how the first disciples followed Christ, how those disciples brought others, how Jesus traveled to Galilee, and then, finally, how he turned water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana. The week ends with the significant statement, "This, the first of his miraculous signs Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee, He thus revealed his glory; and his disciples put their faith in him" (2:11).

The same attention to time is seen in other ways also. For instance, John pays particular attention to time references by which the events of Christ's ministry are marked. Thus, we find him dating Christ's first return to Jerusalem as occurring at the time of "the Jewish Passover" (2:13). Or again, Jesus goes back to Jerusalem a second time, having in the meanwhile left it, at "a feast of the Jews" (5:1). In chapter 6 when Jesus multiplies the loaves and fish in Galilee the "Jewish Passover Feast was near" (v. 4). In chapter 7 he is in Jerusalem for the "Feast of Tabernacles" (v. 2). In chapter 10 we are told of "the Feast of Dedication" (v. 22). The events of the last week of Christ's life take place at the final passover (12:1).

One of the Gospel's most important words is "time," used in connection with Christ's death and resurrection. Early in the Gospel we find expressions like these: "My time has not yet come" (2:4) or "his time had not yet come" (7:30; 8:20). Later, on the verge of the crucifixion, John records: "The hour has come" (12:23), "Jesus knew that the time had come" (13:1), "A time is coming, and has come" (16:32), and "Father, the time has come" (17:1).

We should find ourselves asking: What do I do with my time? Is my time used wisely? Who controls it? Do I really trust God to give me the time needed to do the work that needs to be done?

Who Controls Time?

Expressed in this way our questions about time become a test of our trust in God. This is significant, for it is precisely in this way that the subject is introduced by Jesus in John 11.

To see this we need to notice that when Jesus announced his decision to go to Bethany to help Lazarus, he announced it by inviting the disciples to go with him "to Judea." Apart from the context this was a strange thing to say. We might have expected him to say, "Let us go to help Lazarus" or, perhaps, "Let us go to Bethany." But in saying "Let us go back to Judea," he was deliberately choosing a word that would remind the disciples of what awaited them in the area of the capital. This was where Jesus' enemies lived. It was here that he had almost been stoned. Should they return to Judea? Was this wise? Should they place themselves once again within reach of their enemies? Clearly, by expressing the matter in this way, Jesus was testing his disciples to see whether or not they really trusted God with the ordering of their lives and whether or not they were really willing to spend whatever time might be given to them in Christ's service. Were the disciples willing? They seem to have been. Thomas says later, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (v. 16). But whether they were willing or not, at least this much is clear—they recognized the danger. They said, "A short while ago the Jews tried to stone you; yet you are going back there?" (v. 8). Obviously, it is in time of danger that we most need to trust God. So we can learn from these men. Whatever the danger, it is better to be with Jesus. Whatever the outcome, it is comforting to know that our times are controlled by God.

Sufficient Time

To say that the disciples recognized the danger of going to Jerusalem and chose, nevertheless, to stay by Jesus is not to say, however, that they understood the issues involved. In fact, they did not. They feared the Jewish leaders. And they had not yet learned that all of Christ's times (as also their own) were divinely determined. So Jesus began to teach them about time. He did so first by a question. He asked, "Are

there not twelve hours of daylight?" (v. 9). This question was intended to set them thinking—and to set us thinking. It suggests three truths.

First, God gives each of us a certain amount of time, and *nothing can shorten it.* The day of our life will not finish before it ends. This applied to Jesus, of course. On an earlier occasion, when he was warned about the hostility of King Herod, he said, "Go tell that fox, I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal'" (Luke 13:32). Jesus' life was not going to be cut short by his enemies one minute before the time appointed by the Father. And neither is ours. I am not going to die too soon. You are not going to die too soon. If we are God's children, he has given us a certain number of days, and we shall have them.

An important conclusion follows from this. We need not fear what people can do to us. Or, let me say it in another way. If the prolonging of our days is in our own hands, then we must be extremely careful in all we do. We must be cautious. For instance, are you sure that you really want to take that trip by auto that you have planned for next summer? Many die on the roadways. You may be safer at home. Or again, are you sure you want to eat the kind of food you are often served in local restaurants? Perhaps it is not good for you. You may want to get on to health foods. Or again, are you sure that you have had sufficient medical checkups? Perhaps you should have a checkup each month. Or perhaps you should just check into a hospital permanently. Above all, be sure that you do not anger any one. The person you anger may be the kind that kills people. Be careful not to stand for anything.

You see my point. If God is not in control—if you are in control—then be fearful. On the other hand, if God orders the duration of your days and if nothing can cut them short, then you can be bold to serve him, as Jesus was. Indeed, you can be a Luther. He did not fear men, for he knew that there was God-appointed work to be done and that he would have sufficient time to do it.

Second, Christ's question to the disciples suggests that if God gives us each a certain amount of time and if nothing can shorten it, then *there is*

time enough for everything that needs to be done. The conclusion to be drawn from this truth is that we need not be frantic. We are a fairly frantic people, we Americans. Work seems pressing. Necessities crowd in upon us. Time seems to be slipping away. It is a common picture, as we all know. But it is a picture we have painted for ourselves—this is my point. It is not of God. And since it is not of God, we do not have to be in it.

The principle of sufficient time is one by which we may establish priorities in our lives. If you are God's child and if you seem to have twenty hours of work to do in just sixteen hours, then obviously four hours of that work is not given to you by God. And you should not do it. Moreover, you can ask: What are the dispensable items? Perhaps you do not need that second job. You may, but perhaps you do not. Perhaps God simply does not want you to have the extra income. You may not need to belong to that club, or to that monthly bridge party, or maybe even to that extra committee of the church or that church board. You will not want to cut out your time of personal Bible study, prayer, worship, and fellowship with Christian friends; but there are items you can cut out. Or you can stop wasting time. If we are frantic, it is our fault; we should reorder our priorities. We have sufficient time for all that God has given us to do.

The third truth suggested by Christ's question—"Are there not twelve hours of daylight?"—is that, even though we have sufficient time to do all that God has given us to do, nevertheless, *we have only that time, and the time should not be wasted.* Are there twelve hours to the day? Yes! But there are not thirteen. So we cannot afford to waste even sixty minutes.

William Barclay makes points similar to these in his commentary and at this point calls attention to a famous passage from Christopher Marlowe's play *Doctor Faustus.* Faustus, as most people know from the Faustus legend, had struck a bargain with the devil by which for twenty-four years the devil would be the doctor's servant and in which his every wish would be granted. But, at the end of that time, the devil would claim his soul. At this point in the drama the time has almost

come, and Faustus, seeing what a terrible bargain he has made, is grieving:

> O Faustus,
> Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
> And then thou must be damned perpetually!
>
> Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
> That time may cease and midnight never come;
> Fair nature's eye, rise, rise again and make
> Perpetual day; or let this hour be but A year, a month, a week, a natural day, That Faustus may repent and save his soul!
> *O lente, lente currite noctis equi!*
> The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike, The devil will come and Faustus must be damned.

No one can make a bargain like that. All people start by being condemned, a position from which we escape only by turning in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:16-18). Nevertheless, the verse makes a true point about time. Time is precious. Nothing can lengthen it. Hence, it must be used wisely. Christians must "make the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5).

I am convinced that if we could think this way consistently, any one of these truths would effect a transformation of our lives. We would see many things we do dropping out. We would find many items of higher priority taking their place. And there would be less time wasted. "Only what's done for Christ will last," It is true. So we should spend our precious time in his service.

Christ's Comments

Having asked his question and having thus stimulated the thoughts of the disciples along the lines we have just followed, Jesus wrapped up

his teaching by elaborating briefly upon the question and drawing some conclusions. We need to do the same. He said, "A man who walks by day will not stumble because he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles because he has no light" (vv. 9-10).

This is true on two levels, of course; and Jesus intended both of them. On the physical level, it refers to the sun. In Jesus' day there were no streetlights to illumine the cities. In fact, there was little artificial lighting of any kind. So when the day ended, a man's work had to be done. To be abroad after nightfall was to stumble and risk injury. On this level the words encourage a person to use time wisely.

On the other hand, there is also a spiritual meaning that can hardly escape any perceptive reader of John's Gospel. Here Jesus speaks of "the light of this world." But who can read the phrase without at once thinking of Jesus himself? He is the light of this world. This was one of the designations he gave to himself (John 8:12; 9:5). He is the sun in whose light a man may walk and not stumble. He is the One without whom we are in darkness. In making these observations, therefore, Jesus clearly wanted to raise our thoughts from the physical level (which, however, is valid and important in itself) to the spiritual level, and to cause us to ask: Am I in the darkness, or do I walk with Christ who is the light of life?

Ask that question of yourself. Is your life illuminated by the Lord Jesus Christ? Or is it in darkness? Is your path growing brighter and brighter? The Bible says, "The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn shining ever brighter till the full light of day" (Prov. 4:18). Or does it grow darker with each milepost along it?

If you are in darkness—your own heart will tell you whether you are or not—let me warn you that there is a great danger of falling. Even a Christian may stumble when he turns his back upon Christ. He will stumble but not fall. The Bible speaks of God's power to "keep [him] from falling and to present [him] before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy" (Jude 24). He will not fall, but he may stumble. This is bad enough. But what if you are not a Christian? In this case the

danger is greatly intensified; for if you will not turn to Christ, the time is coming when you will inevitably fall and that so hard that you will not be able to rise again. You will fall eternally.

What is Jesus warning of if it is not this danger? What was the apostle Paul describing when he said of those who refuse to believe, "for they stumbled at that stumbling stone," if it was not that a man or a woman can stumble spiritually and be lost? Jesus was not threatening people. He loved people and attempted to draw them to himself. But he was warning of what would happen if his call was neglected. I wish that you might heed that warning if you are running away from him. Do you sense the darkness? Return to him. Confess your sin. Confess your rebellion. Say, "Lord, I want you to be my Savior." If you do, you will find that he will make your path plain and fill your life with light.

Horatius Bonar, one of our greatest hymn writers, knew this and wrote of his experience:

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's Light;
Look unto me, thy morn
shall rise, And all thy
day be bright."
I looked to Jesus,
and I found In
Him my Star,
my Sun;
And in that light of
life I'll walk, Till
trav'lling days are
done.

It is better to enter into that experience than to come at the end of life's journey to that place described as being shrouded in eternal darkness where all who inhabit it are lost.

Chapter 138.
How Christ Viewed Death

John 11:11-15

There is an openness about death today. Once it was not talked of. Now it is, and with increasing candor.

One person who has contributed to this new openness is a member of my congregation in Philadelphia. His name is Dr. C. Everett Koop, and he is known not only for his leadership in pediatric medicine (where he is a pioneer) but also for the way in which he deals with the subject of impending death in his contacts with the parents of his patients. His writings on this subject have appeared in the *Reader's Digest* and in other publications. The Nurses Christian Fellowship, to give another example, is now conducting seminars on the subject of caring for the dying patient. These seminars are well attended. In the secular world, others, such as the late newspaper columnist Stewart Alsop, have made the subject popular. Alsop, while dying of leukemia, wrote of his struggle with death in a book entitled *Stay of Execution.* Once again, this is evidence of the new openness I am talking about.

But this brings us to an interesting question. For if we are finding out what the doctors, nurses, and columnists think of death today, certainly we also find ourselves wanting to ask, "But what did Jesus Christ think about death?" He was in contact with death—his own, which he clearly saw coming, and that of others. How did he regard it? Did he accept death? Or did he long for a stay of execution? What Jesus thought on the subject is important, obviously, as we all realize. For he had information that we do not have, and his views should illuminate our own.

Two Deaths

We must begin with the fact that Christ's answer to the question was twofold, depending upon whether the death in view was the death of an unbeliever or a believer. If the death was the death of an unbeliever,

Jesus was not encouraging. In fact, he warned men against dying in this state. To die without faith in himself as the Savior was to enter hell, he said. He spoke of this as a place of "eternal fire" (Matt. 25:41) or "eternal punishment" (Matt. 25:46). He said that it was a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:42). At one point he told a story of a rich man who was suffering in hades and who appealed to Abraham to send someone to cool his tongue (Luke 16:19-31). He said on another occasion: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28).

The explanation of Christ's sternness at this point is not hard to find. For in the teaching of the Bible death is separation, and the death of an unbeliever is a separation of the soul and the spirit from God. God is light. So a separation from God in death means darkness. God is the source of all good gifts. Death means a deprivation of those gifts. It is this dimension, not suffering alone, that makes death the fearful thing it is for unbelievers.

On the other hand, Jesus was most encouraging about the death of believers. In fact, he was as encouraging on this aspect of the question as he was discouraging on the other. Here he spoke of entering into Abraham's bosom, or paradise (Luke 16:22; 23:43). He spoke of a land filled with many mansions, which he was going to prepare for those who followed him (John 14:2). In the passage that we are about to study he called death "sleep" and said that he was glad that it had happened to his friend Lazarus. This passage reads: "After he had said this, he went on to tell them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going to wake him up.' His disciples replied, 'Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.' Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he had meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead, and for your sakes I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But, let us go to him'" (vv. 1115).

Lazarus Dead and Jesus Glad

What a striking expression this is—"Lazarus is dead, and I am glad." We might understand it better if Jesus had said, "Lazarus is sleeping physically, and I am glad," for we would then have thought as the disciples thought when they apparently first misunderstood Christ's meaning. We would have thought that sleep is a good thing and that Lazarus might therefore recover. But this is not what Christ said. He said, "Lazarus is *dead,* and I am glad." So we find ourselves asking, "How can Jesus be glad? How can death possibly be a cause for rejoicing?"

There are several answers to this question, and they are all in the passage. First, Jesus was glad at Lazarus's death because Lazarus was a believer and he understood what the death of a believer was. It was not to be feared. It was a homecoming. In these verses he terms it a "sleep," which it is, and implies that not only is it not to be feared but rather that it is to be regarded as something beneficial.

We understand this better when we begin to reflect on sleep itself and of the good that comes from it. Notice first that sleep is *harmless.* So also is death for the believer. David knew this. He wrote in the Twenty-third Psalm, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" (v. 4). Or again, Paul wrote, "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:56-57).

Let me give this illustration concerning death's shadow. In Scotland an old man lay dying. He was afraid of death. The minister who was attending him was trying to comfort him. The minister asked if he had not been a shepherd. "Aye," answered the Scotsman, "I have waited upon the sheep many a day."

"And," asked the minister, "did you never stand on the hillside and watch the wind blow a cloud across the valley?"

"Many a time," said the dying man.

"And when the shadow of that cloud came racing across the heather toward you and the flock, were you afraid?"

The old shepherd drew himself up slightly from his pillow and cried, "What! Afraid of a shadow? Jamie has covenanters' blood in his veins, and he has never been afraid of anything."

The minister then turned to his Bible and read the Twenty-third Psalm as the truth broke over Jamie: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."

For us death is indeed a shadow. But it is a shadow only because the grim reality of death with all its horror laid hold of our shepherd. Is death separation, separation from God? This is what Jesus bore for those who are his sheep. He was separated from the Father. He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He was separated so that for us death might be a shadow.

May I make that even plainer? In the year 1776, the year of the signing of the American Declaration of Independence, an English minister, the Reverend Augustus M. Toplady, was walking across a field in Somersetshire when he was suddenly overtaken by a storm. He was still several miles from home. The place was exposed. But he noticed a cleft running down a mass of rock beside a road, and in that cleft he took refuge. There he stayed till the storm passed.
Toplady was a godly man. He had been converted in 1740, at the age of sixteen, while sitting in a barn listening to a man preach who could not even write his name. Toplady had since had a very fruitful ministry. Now, sitting in the cleft of the rock, he thought of spiritual things and, picking up a playing card that he found lying on the ground at his feet, he began to write the words of a hymn that has since become one of the most popular of the English-speaking world.

> Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in thee.

This is why the death of a believer is harmless. It is not that death itself is harmless, but rather that Christ has tasted death fully in place of those who believe on him. He was struck for us in order that we might hide in him as the storms of death pass by.

Second, we may note that sleep is *restful.* It is a relief from the work of the day. The Book of
Ecclesiastes notes that "the sleep of a laborer is sweet" (Eccl. 5:12). The disciples said of
Lazarus, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better" (v. 12). It is the same with death. Thus, in Revelation we read, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them'" (14:13).

Let me say that I do not believe this means that there will be nothing to do in heaven. In fact, I believe that the opposite will be the case. I believe that the life of heaven will be filled with activity; for God is active himself—he is the Creator after all—and we shall be like him. Heaven will not be restful in the sense that there will be no work to do. But it will be restful in the sense that what we do will be done without toil; that is, without the strain, labor, and sorrow that work involves in this life because of sin's curse.

There is one more thing about the resemblance between death and sleep. Sleep is *temporary.* That is, we sleep to rise again. In the same way, death is temporary. We die, but we do so in order to rise to a world prepared for us by our heavenly Father.

Moreover, on the spiritual level death is so temporary that it can hardly be described by timewords at all. How long is death? It has no duration. It is a passage rather, a passage from this world to the next. It is a doorway. Thus, to be absent from the body is "to be at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8).

There is a wonderful illustration of this truth in a detail from the funeral of Sir Winston

Churchill. At one point in the funeral service a bugler, stationed high in the dome of St. Paul's Church in London, where the funeral took place, sounded taps while everyone waited in hushed silence. Taps signifies the end of the day in military circles. So this was a way of marking the end of Churchill's long and distinguished life. To some extent it was the passing of an era. It was sad, even a bit mournful. But then—and this is the point for which I tell the story—no sooner had the notes of taps died away in that great cathedral than the bugle sounded again. But this time the tune was not taps. The tune was reveille, the call by which the military world begins a new day. Churchill wished to give testimony to the truth that death is only a gateway into God's presence, into a life lived in his eternal day.

Since this is what death is, it is no wonder that Jesus could say, "Lazarus is dead, and I am glad."

A Resurrection

There was a second reason why Jesus could say that he was glad, however. In some ways it is the most obvious. Jesus was glad because he knew that he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. This is what he implies in the same verse that speaks of Lazarus sleeping; for he says, "I am going there to wake him up" (v.ll).

Death could not exist in the presence of Jesus. There is no indication anywhere in Scripture that Jesus ever met a dead person and failed to raise him. On one occasion, when he was passing the little village of Nain, in Galilee, he met a funeral procession coming out of the city. A man had died, the only son of a widow. Jesus went to the bier, touched the dead man, and restored him to life. On another occasion, Jesus raised the daughter of a certain ruler of the synagogue, named Jairus. Here it is Lazarus who is raised. Jesus never met a funeral that he did not stop. In fact, I would be willing to state that he never came across an illness of any kind without making the situation right. So he was always glad. As here, he could rejoice at the outcome.

May I add one more thought? Jesus is able to raise the dead, as I have indicated; but, note this, *only* he can do it. No one else can. If a person

is sick but not yet dead, there is a place for physicians. Medicine coupled with the skill of doctors and the natural rejuvenating powers of the human body can do wonders. But if the person is dead, then the doctors are useless. Only the voice of the divine Christ can call forth life in resurrection.

If only Jesus can call forth the dead, do you know the voice that will call them? Not everyone knows Christ's voice. Jesus said of many of his day, "You cannot hear my word" (John 8:43). He said that only those could hear who had been given to him by the Father. Only his sheep could respond (John 10:27). Are you one of his sheep? Have you been given to Christ by the Father? If you cannot answer that question with a firm yes, perhaps you should put yourself in a place where, by the grace of God, you may hear Christ's voice even now. Begin to read the Bible. Expose yourself to the preaching of the gospel by faithful men. Converse with those who already know Christ. Begin to attend church services. It may be that Jesus will speak to you, bringing forth spiritual life in your otherwise dead heart, and begin to prepare you for that second call that will raise you to the life of heaven.

A Strengthening of Faith

Jesus was glad that Lazarus had died, for a third reason. He was glad because he knew that he would raise Lazarus. He was glad because he knew that the resurrection would result in a strengthening of the faith of many. He indicates this by saying, "And for your sake I am glad I was not there so that you may believe" (v. 15). The faith of the disciples was to be strengthened. The faith of Martha and Mary was to be strengthened. Indeed, many who at that time did not even have faith were to come to it as a result of this dramatic resurrection.

The last point can be applied to you who are Christians by asking whether the resurrection that Jesus has performed in you has had that effect on other persons. Has your resurrection helped others to find Jesus? Perhaps you are saying, "What do you mean, my resurrection? My resurrection has not yet occurred. It will occur at the last day." Are

you sure of that? Are you sure that this is the only resurrection you can talk about?

You must remember at this point that while all the miracles recorded are true, nevertheless these are recorded (rather than others) because these miracles are superb illustrations of salvation. Thus, the impotent man is a picture of each of us before we are restored spiritually. We are helpless, unable to move, unable to take even the first step toward Jesus. The man born blind is another example. He was unable to see Jesus. If Jesus had told the man to seek him and that he would then help him, the man could not have done it. Yet Jesus saved him. In the same way, the story of Lazarus is included to show what it means to be "dead in trespasses and sins" and why it is necessary that the voice of Christ sound forth to rouse us from this spiritual slumber. We will not awaken spiritually unless Christ calls. But when he calls we do awaken. This is your experience if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so the question holds: Has your resurrection helped others to find Jesus?

This is what Paul wanted as a result of his transformed life. Do you remember that verse in the third chapter of Philippians in which he expresses the hope that he might "attain the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:11)? The phrase does not suggest that Paul was uncertain about the ultimate outcome of his salvation, as though he might one day discover he was lost. The one who wrote in Romans, "For I am convinced that [nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39), does not mean that. What Paul meant was that he wanted to attain unto the resurrection now; that is, to live as a resurrected one among the millions who are spiritually dead, so that they might have a preview of eternal life in action and that some at least might come to faith in the Savior.

That is what I desire for you, if you are a Christian. You have been dead spiritually. You have been made alive in Jesus. Well, then, can others see it? That is one way in which Jesus would like to express joy in your death and resurrection.

Chapter 139.
The Shadow of Death

John 11:16

I do not know why a man's failures are often long remembered and his attainments forgotten, but that is the way things are. And it is not only in our own time that they are like this. Shakespeare phrased it perfectly when he had Antony say at the funeral of his friend Julius Caesar, "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones."

The same thing is true of one of the minor characters of John's Gospel. His name is Thomas. Such is our opinion of him that no sooner do we hear that name than we immediately remember that one incident for which he is least praiseworthy. "Doubting Thomas!" That is the phrase that comes into our minds, for we automatically think of the story in which Thomas expressed disbelief in Christ's resurrection. Jesus had already appeared to the other disciples, Thomas being absent. But when Thomas was told about it, he replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20:25). We forget that the other disciples did not believe until they had seen Christ either. But we remember this story and by it form our one-sided opinions of Christ's doubting disciple.

What a different picture we might have of Thomas if we could only remember the incident that occurs in the eleventh chapter of the same Gospel!

The Story

To understand this story we must remember that Jesus had announced his intention of returning to the area of Jerusalem and that only a few moments before this he had reminded his disciples of the danger that awaited them there. The danger was no illusion. The disciples were understandably frightened. Christ's enemies had tried to stone him on

several occasions and in different places. But the opposition at Jerusalem had been extremely fierce; and the last incident, which had taken place only weeks before, was the most frightening of all. We sense the true danger when we recall that on this occasion Jesus actually left Jerusalem for the area of the Jordan River.

Now he was going back, and the disciples were frightened again. They knew that they could not stop Jesus if he had determined to return. But what were they to do? I can imagine them looking around at one another, then at the ground, then at Jesus. I can imagine them wondering, "What will happen to Jesus if he goes to Jerusalem? No doubt he will die. What will happen to us if we follow him? No doubt we will die also." Perhaps there was a long pause. But at last one of the disciples spoke up with precisely the right words for the occasion. That disciple was Thomas. Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (11:16).

I must admit that this was hardly a cheery statement. It was melancholy, even a bit grim. Thomas did tend to look on the worst side of things after all. Still, I cannot help admiring his words. For one thing, they were honest. The way to Jerusalem *was* the way to death. Second, they were loyal. Thomas was saying that no matter what lay ahead it was better to be with Jesus. And so it is. It is always better to be with Jesus. Finally, the words were courageous. In taking this stand Thomas was literally stating his willingness to walk with Christ into the lion's den.

I know that the time came when Thomas, as well as the others, forsook Christ and fled from him. I also know that the death in Jerusalem was not the whole story, that there was a resurrection beyond it. But all this was before Thomas, and at the time (regardless of what the future held) he did the right thing. So let us remember this and try to be like Thomas in his best moments.

Death and Denial

We might be helped in remembering this incident from the life of Thomas if we remember that it is only one expression in Scripture of an

important and pervasive principle. It is the principle of *death and denial*—of dying, of saying no to oneself and to the world in order that we might say yes to Christ. This principle is found throughout the New Testament. For instance, in Romans 6 we read, "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might by done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (vv. 5-6). Or again, in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ." Or, later on, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14).

Let me say again, then, that this is a very important principle, and not the least because we do not naturally want to fit into it. Who wants to die, after all? No one! Who wants to deny himself? Who wants to turn down a chance to fulfill his desires? No one! Moreover, we live in the midst of a world that says no to nothing. No is unpopular. Yet this is where Christianity begins, in one sense, and it is the sole way that victory in the Christian life may be established. In other words, to know victory in the Christian life we must become like Thomas. Like him we hear Christ's call, and like him we are at once aware of many other things that we would rather do or become. But we must not do them. Like Thomas we must turn our backs on these things and follow Jesus.

One Principle, Two Applications

This should not be difficult for us to understand, if we are Christians. For this is where Christianity began for us, as I have indicated. What does it mean to have become a Christian? It means to have turned your back on any attempt to please God by your own efforts and instead to have accepted by faith what God has done in Christ for your salvation. No man can save himself. So we must stop trying. We must die to our efforts. We must say no to them. It is only after we have done this that we can receive God's salvation as a gift.

Let me give an illustration of this from the testimony of Paul. Before his conversion Paul had been trying to please God by his personal

achievements. After he had met Christ on the road to Damascus, he said no to this course of action and instead lived for Christ. His own words on the matter are expressive. He wrote, "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him" (Phil. 3:7-8). This is where the Christian life begins. So, as I say, the principle of death and denial should not be a difficult one for any true Christian to understand.

The difficulty, however (as in many other areas in life), is not with understanding so much as it is with application; and it is here that most of us fall down. The first application of the principle is to the moment of faith in Christ, and we have both understood and applied the principle at that point—if we are Christians. But then—this is so common—we have forgotten that the principle must also be applied to the living of the Christian life, if we really are to live it. Life? Yes. But only after death. Blessing? Yes. But only after we have taken up our cross.

Let me be explicit at this point. If we are really going to experience death and denial that, in one sense, is the basis of the Christian life, then we must be willing to say no to anything that is contrary to God's will and way for us.

First, it means saying no to anything that is contrary to God's revelation of himself; that is, anything contrary to the Bible. This is the way in which we are to approach the law, for instance. We are not under law in the sense of being under a list of rules and regulations. We are free from that. But we are to obey the law in the sense that it reveals to us the nature of God and shows us those areas of life in which by the power of God we are to say no in order that we might go on with Christ. The first of the Ten Commandments is an example: "You shall have no other gods before me." Here is a negative, an obvious one. It tells us that we are to say no to anything that would take God's rightful place in our lives. Is it an actual idol? We must say no to the idol; we must burn it,

destroy it, as many primitive people have done when they have responded to the gospel. Is it money? If so, we must get rid of the money; for it is better to be poor and a close follower of Christ than rich and far from him. Do not misunderstand. Money is not something that necessarily takes the place of God in a life. It is possible to be a devoted and deeply spiritual Christian and rich at the same time. But if it is or has become a god, then we must say no to it, for "You shall have no other gods before me." Is it another person who has taken the place of God for you? Is it a business? An ambition? Your children? Fame? Achievement? Whatever it is, you must say no to it, if it is keeping you from Christ. This is the negative principle, the principle of dying. It must be taken seriously.

If you want to test yourself on this, you may do so with each of the other commandments. "You shall not murder." This means that we are to say no to any desire to take another's life or slander his reputation. "You shall not commit adultery." We are to say no to any desire to take another man's wife or another woman's husband. "You shall not steal." We must say no to the desire to take another person's property. If we have not said no at these points, then we can hardly pretend that we are living in the newness of Christ's resurrection life. Indeed, we are not living the life of Christ at all.

Second, if we are going to experience death and denial, we must also say no to anything that is not the will of God for us. In one sense, this point is related to the previous one about the law. But it also goes beyond it in that not everything permitted in the Word of God is God's will for us. For instance, there is nothing at all wrong with marriage. In fact, the contrary is true.
Marriage was created by God and has his blessing. Still, marriage may not be the will of God for you; and if it is not, then you must say no to marriage, consciously and deliberately. Until you do you will not really begin to live the life God has for you. The same thing holds true for a profession, for your own conception of yourself, and for many other matters.

Two quick questions before we go on. First, how can I learn to say no? The answer: watch Jesus, follow him. He is the supreme example of self-denial, for he said no even to the glories of heaven in order that he might become man and die for our salvation. We can learn from him. It was certainly from watching Christ that Thomas was able to say what he did on the occasion of their joint return to Jerusalem.

The second question: How can I know when I have said no? The answer is: when you have stopped complaining. If you are murmuring, as the Israelites murmured in the wilderness, you have not really turned your back on Egypt. But if you have stopped murmuring, then you are ready to go on, as Paul was when he said, "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).

Resurrection

I have emphasized the principle of death and denial—first, because it is the major lesson of our text, and second, because it is not often taught to today's Christians. However, I do not want to leave the text at this point, for as it stands it is still one-sided. Death *is* a great principle. It is this that Thomas's words so clearly teach us. But there is also more. In the biblical scheme of things death is always followed by life, crucifixion by the resurrection. It is this that is truly exciting and for which we are willing to die.

Let us go back for a minute to the texts I quoted earlier. "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly *also* be united with him in his resurrection" (Rom. 6:5). True, we must die to self; but we do so in order that we might live to Christ. We die "that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (v. 6). We read something similar in Galatians: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). We also find the truth just one

chapter farther on in John's Gospel. Jesus is speaking. He says, "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, *it produces many seeds.* The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (12:24-25).

What does this mean practically? It means that when we give up trying to run our own lives or when we give up those things that seem so precious and so utterly indispensible to us, then (and only then) do we find the true joy of being a Christian and enter into lives so freed from the obsessions that we can hardly understand from that point on how they could have had such a strong hold on us.

So what is the difference between a joyless Christian and a joyful Christian, a defeated and a victorious one? Death and resurrection! The joyless Christian may have died and risen with Christ in some abstract, theological sense, so that he can in the same sense be termed "a new creature in Christ." But he has certainly never known it in practice. On the other hand, the joyful Christian has found satisfaction in whatever God dispenses to him and is truly satisfied, for he has said no to anything that might keep him from the richness of God's own blessing and presence, and has risen into new life.

A Word to Others

One final thought comes from these ten brief words of Thomas. Have you noticed that Thomas was not only willing to deny himself in order to follow Christ but that he also invited others to do so? His exact words were, "*Let us* also go, that *we* may die with him." He wanted the others to do as he did. And he was successful in his invitation, for a little later in the chapter we find that the disciples are all still with Jesus. Are you like Thomas in that? You may already have learned these lessons. Of course, you may not have; and if this is the case, you must begin there. But if you have, if you have really learned to say no and have thereby also entered into the joy of new life in Christ, then this is the point at which you in particular must imitate Thomas. If you have learned these

things, teach others. If you have found joy, invite them to follow the One who taught you how to find it.

Thomas! The word means "twin" in Hebrew; it is the equivalent of Didymus, which means "twin" in Greek. Thomas was a twin. I wonder who the other one was. He was not one of the other disciples certainly. He may not even have been a man; the twin may have been a woman. We cannot know. Yet there is a sense in which I would like you to find him. I would like you to find him every time you look into the mirror. Only I would like you to find, not "doubting Thomas," but rather the one who said to others, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Chapter 140.
"I Am the Resurrection and the Life"

John 11:17-26

About fifty years before the birth of Jesus Christ a letter was written by a well-known Roman, Sulpicius Severus, to the great orator Cicero on the occasion of the death of Cicero's beloved daughter Tullia. It is a magnificent letter. It expresses deep sympathy. It reminds the orator that his daughter had only experienced a lot common to mankind and had passed away only when the freedom of the Republic was itself failing. It is warm and moving. But in spite of these great qualities the letter contains nothing of a hope of life beyond the grave. In reply, Cicero thanks his friend for his sympathy and enlarges upon the measure of his loss. A century later the apostle Paul was in contact with Christians who had become similarly discouraged by the death of their friends, as the result of which he too has left us a letter. But Paul's letter is different. True, it acknowledges sorrow; but it also breathes hope. It deals with death, but it also knows the comfort of a resurrection. In it Paul writes, "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring

with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him___Therefore encourage each other with these words" (1 Thess. 4:13-14, 18).

These letters present a remarkable contrast, for they throw into relief that new awareness of the future life introduced by Christianity. Cicero was not unaware of Plato's arguments for immortality or of any of the other arguments advanced in his day, but these were poor comfort in face of the cruel horror of death. Paul, on the other hand, moves in a new spirit of hope and confidence.

A Troubled Believer

Before we look at Christ's statement regarding the resurrection and of himself as "the resurrection and the life," we need to look at the one to whom he spoke it. For the person to whom he spoke was Martha, and Martha is an excellent example of a certain type of believer, of whom we have many today. These do not distrust the Lord, but neither do they believe with that full confidence that would allow them to lay aside their care and rest in his good provision. They believe, but they are always troubling themselves with questions of "How?" and "Why?" and "What if?" and so miss the blessing that could be theirs if they would only believe more simply.

Such faith always *attempts to limit God* or, which is the same thing, to scale down his promises. Notice that Martha limited the Lord's working both to time and place, for she said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v. 21).

We need to recall here that Jesus had deliberately delayed his return to Bethany for two days so that he eventually arrived in Bethany four full days after Lazarus' burial. Some have felt that Jesus delayed until Lazarus had died (and have imagined this to be cruel), but a careful thinking through of the days will show that this probably was not true. If we number the days one through four, we can reconstruct what happened. On the first day, as Lazarus was getting worse, the sisters sent to Jesus. Apparently Lazarus died some time after the departure of the messenger and was quickly buried, so that this day counts as the

first of the four in which he lay in the tomb. Quick burials were customary in such a hot climate. The next two days Jesus stayed in the area of the Jordan; that is, days two and three. Then, on the fourth day, Jesus returned to Bethany and performed the resurrection.

Lazarus was therefore already dead by the time word of his illness reached Jesus; Jesus knew of it and therefore delayed his return, not that Lazarus might die but for an entirely different purpose. The reason Jesus delayed his return from the Jordan was that there might be no doubt that Lazarus was dead and that there might therefore be no cause for doubting the miracle. Thus we know that from the beginning he intended to perform it.

Martha did not see this, however, so when Jesus returned to Bethany her first words were a bit of rebuke. And they expressed her own limited faith, as I have indicated. "If you *had been* here," she said. That is, she felt that Jesus could have done something four days earlier but that he could not do what was obviously necessary now. True, one verse later Martha says, "But I know that even now, God will give you whatever you ask" (v. 22). But we know that her "whatever" did not include a resurrection, for she was quick to rebuke Christ later when he asked that the stone be rolled away from the tomb of Lazarus. Moreover, Martha also clearly tried to limit Christ by place; for she said, "If you had been *here*" that is, in Bethany. It implied that Jesus could not have healed her brother from a distance. A little later she does the same thing when she reacts to Christ's promise concerning her brother—"Your brother will rise again"—by saying, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (v. 24).

In the same way many of us also seek to limit Jesus. We believe that he is able to do all he says he will do—but not now and not here. At least we do not expect him to and are genuinely surprised or disbelieving when he does.

The second characteristic of Martha's strange faith is that she *treated the words of Christ impersonally.* The first recorded words of Jesus after his return to Bethany were a tremendous promise. He said, "Your brother

will rise again" (v. 23). But instead of taking this in the best and most personal sense—as a promise that Jesus was about to restore her brother to her—Martha pushed the words off into the future as though to say that they had no relationship either to herself or her situation.

This is also what we do with Christ's promises, many of us. We believe them, in a sense, that is, as they apply to others or to a far distant time. But we do not receive them personally. For us, the glorious promises of God become something like a mighty fleet that has been put in moth balls, or like antiques in the attic. They have value, we suppose; but practically we get nothing out of them. The story is told of a gentleman who visited the home of a poor French couple a long time ago where he saw a note for one thousand francs papered to the wall. He asked them how they got that particular piece of paper. They answered that they had found a poor soldier, who had been wounded, and that they had nursed him in their home until he died. He had given it to them. It was such a nice memorial of him, they thought, that they had caused it to be plastered to the wall where they would always be able to see it. Naturally they were surprised when they were told that it would be worth quite a little fortune to them if they would turn it into money.

Unfortunately many Christians do that with God's promises. But they should not—that is the point. As Spurgeon once wrote, they should have "grace to turn God's bullion ... into current coin."

A New Revelation

We have looked at Martha, then. Let us now look at Jesus and at the way in which he dealt with her. She had come expressing a poor kind of faith, a faith that was half faith and half doubt. Even her words had a hint of rebuke about them. But Jesus did not get angry with her for her weak faith, or rebuke her in turn for her attitude. He could have said, "Martha, Martha, what poor thoughts you have of me. I have been with you for a long time and you still do not know that I am both willing to and will raise your brother." He could have said something like that, but he did not. Rebuke in a time of great sorrow is not helpful, and is uncalled for. Besides, it would even have been misunderstood; for

Martha thought she was expressing great faith in Jesus when she said, "But I know that even now, God will give you whatever you ask" (v. 22).

Instead, Jesus used the opportunity to teach Martha more of himself. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (vv. 25-26).

What did Jesus teach Martha? His first words were words to her condition specifically. She had attempted to push the resurrection off to the last day. Jesus replied by saying that he himself was the resurrection and that, therefore, wherever he is there is life. In this case, the Lord Jesus Christ was present physically; so there was going to be physical life. Lazarus would live again. When Jesus returns physically at the end of this age, there will be a physical resurrection then also. At other times, as today, Jesus is present spiritually; so there is a spiritual resurrection rather than a physical one. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have experienced this resurrection. You were dead in trespasses and sins, but you have been brought to life by Jesus.

Likewise, all who know the Lord Jesus Christ will experience a physical resurrection. So at this point, having spoken directly to Martha's situation, Jesus goes on to develop his teaching. "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (vv. 25-26).

These comments can mean any of three things. First, both halves of Christ's saying can be taken spiritually. If we do this, the sense would be, "Whoever believes in me, though he were spiritually dead, yet shall he become spiritually alive. And whosoever is spiritually alive and continues to believe in me shall never die spiritually." The advantage of this interpretation is that it takes the terms in the same sense. If it is followed, the major thought is that the one who believes in Christ, having received the eternal life of God, will never be lost.

The second interpretation is one that takes the first half of Christ's words physically and the second half spiritually. It would give us a meaning somewhat like this: "He who believes in me, even though he should die physically, yet he will live physically [that is, there will be a final resurrection]. And whosoever is spiritually alive and believes in me shall not die spiritually." The advantage of this interpretation is that it relates to Martha's problem directly—the problem of physical death answered by physical resurrection. The disadvantage is that the terms, particularly the term "life," must be taken in different senses.

The third interpretation takes both halves of Christ's statement physically, that is, as applying to the time of Christ's second coming at which time those who are alive will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air while those who have died will be raised physically. This, while true, does not seem to relate to the situation in John 11. But if it were the meaning of the verses, we would have to read them like this: "He who believes in me, though he shall have died physically by the time of my return, yet shall he be raised. And whoever is a believer and is still living at the time of my return, shall never die physically but shall be caught up to heaven." This was the interpretation of C. H. Spurgeon and some other commentators.

Which of these is to be preferred? It is probably impossible to say with certainty; for, since the statements involved in each view are true in themselves, each could be possible. In my opinion the second is the most likely in that it begins with Martha's situation but then goes on to present a higher principle. If this is the case, then Christ's promises are all-inclusive. There is a promise of spiritual life and physical life. There is a promise of life now and also life to come. Moreover, it is clearly stated that this life is only for those who believe on Christ and who are therefore members of his covenant people.

A Direct Application

This brings us to our conclusion, which is at the same time (let us note) the conclusion that Jesus pressed upon Martha. It is a conclusion in the form of a question: "Do you believe this?" (v. 26). Jesus had made a

statement ("I am the resurrection and the life"); he had elaborated upon it. Now he asks, "Do you believe this? Do you really believe it?" This is the question I would like to leave with you also. Do you believe Christ's teaching?

As you think about it, notice that Jesus speaks of faith and not feeling. He did not say to Martha, "Do you feel better now, Martha? Have you found these thoughts comforting? Do you feel your old optimism returning?" According to Jesus it was not how she felt that was important, but what she believed. Feelings are deceiving. Moreover, they come and go. On the other hand, faith is an anchor fixed in bedrock. To believe the words of Jesus is to believe in One whose promises are absolutely trustworthy.

Notice also that Christ was specific. He did not say, "Martha, do you believe generally?" He said, "Martha, do you believe *this?* That is, do you believe the specific truths I have taught you?"

I ask that question of you. I trust that your answer may be different. Do you believe this? You should be able to say, "Yes, Lord, I believe it. I believe all that is written in your Book.

"I believe in one great God, who has made this earth and has placed me upon it. I believe that I am sinful. I believe that this same God in love and wisdom sent the Lord Jesus Christ to die for me that I might be saved. I believe that Jesus existed with God and as God from the beginning, that he became man, that his death was a substitutionary death for me by which my sin has been removed as far as the east is from the west and on the basis of which it will be remembered against me no more. I believe in Christ's historical, literal, and bodily resurrection, by which God has demonstrated that Christ's sacrifice on the cross is acceptable to him as an all-sufficient atonement for the sin of his people and in which he has also given a foretaste of the coming resurrection of all who believe on him. I believe in the person and power of the Holy Spirit. I believe that he opens blind eyes to see Christ and moves rebellious wills to embrace him to their salvation. I believe that he illuminates the written Word of God so that those who are saved

can understand it and obey it. I believe in the fellowship of the saints. I believe in the church. I believe in God's providence, by which nothing enters the life of the Christian that is not the product either of God's direct or permissive will. I believe that God chastises his children. I believe that he is determined to perfect the character of Jesus Christ in all who are united to Christ by faith. I believe that Jesus will one day return from heaven even as he was seen to go into heaven—bodily and in time. I believe that in that day there will be a final resurrection of believers to the life of heaven and of unbelievers to judgment. In hell there will be suffering. In heaven there will be a life of blessing prepared in advance by God for those whom he has chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world."

There is much more that can be said, of course. But every Christian should be able to say at least that. "Do you believe this?" You should be able to echo the teaching of the written Word in answer to the question of the living Word, rounding it off with a hearty, "Yes, Lord, I believe all that is written in your Book."

Chapter 141.
Faith's Foothold

John 11:27

In our last study, as we were looking at Christ's question to Martha on the occasion of his return to Bethany soon after Lazarus had died, we saw what our answer should be to the question, "Do you believe this?" We should be able to respond, "Lord, I believe everything you say. I believe what is written in your Book." This involves the truth that God is the creator and sustainer of life; that we are sinners; that God has redeemed us in Christ Jesus, his Son; that Jesus rose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is coming again; that there will be a final judgment; and many other doctrines. However, it may be that some will hear this and say, "I know that is good, and I wish I could

affirm all those things. But I haven't come that far. I cannot say them for certain. What should I do?" If that is the case in your life, then the verse to which we now come is for you personally.

Jesus had asked Martha, "Do you believe this?" Her answer is the verse we are considering. She replied, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (v. 27).

We should notice that Martha did not reply directly to what Christ had asked, for her answer did not include her assent to what he had been teaching. Still, it was a good reply. She did not affirm more than she knew, but she affirmed what she did know. Moreover, I am sure that from this point she went on to even greater understanding.

I call her words "faith's foothold," for they were a sure support from which she could climb higher. I have often seen a mountain climber make his way up an outcropping of rock, which someone else might consider unclimbable, simply by finding small footholds in the rock's surface. They are not big, but they are firm; and one who will rest his whole weight on them can move up and on from that position. This is what Martha did. Her sphere of knowledge was not large, but it was firm. So she built upon it. It is my desire that many might begin as she began, as a result of this study.

The Words of Jesus

When we consider her answer a phrase at a time, we notice, first of all, that she gives the *basis* of her understanding. The basis is the word of Christ. We have it in her affirmative response: "Yes, Lord, I believe." This does not mean that she understands everything he has been saying —in fact, she did not—but rather that she accepts it, whatever it is, because she knows that his words are trustworthy. This is an ideal starting point for anyone. This should be true of your spiritual understanding.

Moreover, it is not only that Jesus' words are absolutely trustworthy. It is also the case that *only* his words are fully trustworthy. With anyone else the question of truth is relative. A person may speak what is true at

one time but what is false at another. Or he may speak partial truth; that is, truth mixed with error. Or he may not know what is true. With Jesus it is different. Jesus spoke the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Moreover, he claimed to be the truth; for he said in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life." In other words, according to Jesus, the only valid starting point in any religious matter is what he himself has said and done, and not the words or deeds of some other person.

Why is it that in a discussion of religious questions someone will frequently express an opinion on something of which he has no knowledge at all and others will at once adopt his opinion, while the words of Jesus on the same subject (about which he has knowledge) are ignored?

Let me give an example. Someone says, "I believe in reincarnation. If you do well in this life, you will reappear as a person with a good position in life—perhaps someone rich or in a position of authority. If you do badly, you may reappear as an animal or insect. Eventually, if you do well enough, you may progress up and out of the system into a blessed state." Someone who is listening replies, "That sounds good to me. I'll believe in reincarnation too." But why should he? There is no evidence for that view of the afterlife whatsoever; so any opinion about it is groundless. On the other hand, Jesus, who came from eternity and who returned to it, who demonstrated the truth of his claims by means of a resurrection, taught the conscious continuation of the individual soul beyond death, in which state he either suffers for his sins as the result of a punishment imposed by God or else enjoys the bliss of heaven on the basis of Christ's death for him, which he has received by faith—and this is neglected. Why? Generally it is because men and women do not like what God says to them. The Bible says simply that it is because they do not like to retain God in their knowledge and so prefer lies.

When we are talking about the words of Jesus in this way, we must realize that we are also talking about the whole of Scripture, for he

inspired Scripture. Indeed, his Spirit stands behind the particular words and books that have been written.

Let us be clear about the fact that we live in a day when men and women have grown unhappy with this book and have therefore thrown it off. Let us also note that they have done so because they do not like what it says, not because it has been shown to be untrustworthy. The standard view is that modern biblical criticism has shown that the Bible contains errors. This quotation expresses it: "The scientific development of the last century has rendered untenable the whole conception of the Bible as a verbally inspired book, to which we can appeal with absolute certainty for infallible guidance in all matters of faith and conduct." But the fact that this is *not* the major reason why the Bible is neglected is seen in the truth that most people who neglect the Bible cannot give you even one example of an alleged error in Scripture, let alone prove it to be an error. So it is not the supposed errors that have turned them off, but the Bible's teaching. It is that the Bible reveals men and women to be sinners in need of a Savior and that most persons do not like to be told this. If men and women were praised by God, biblical truth would be popular.

What shall we do then? Shall we also throw off the Bible and with it the words of Christ? How can we? If we were to do that, we would be abandoning the only sure source of spiritual knowledge available to fallen man, and we would be rendering an answer to the question "Do you believe this?" impossible. Without a sure word from God we cannot believe anything. Indeed, all is uncertain and there are no answers to the great spiritual questions that confront us. On the other hand, with the Bible as a base we can go on to sure knowledge and expanding faith, as Martha did.

It is my firm conviction that we will not have a true revival in today's church until the church as a whole returns to this high view of Scripture. "Yes, Lord, I believe." This should be our starting point, and we should say both to God and others that we do believe all that the Scriptures

teach. Indeed, the Word should become our starting point and thus also our only infallible rule of faith and practice.

A Threefold Confession

The second important thing we should notice about this verse is that it also gives a statement of *content* as regards Martha's confession. The first notable feature is the basis upon which she believes. The second is the content or *what* she believes. Clearly this is also important, for faith without content is meaningless. If a person says, "I believe," we want to ask, "But what do you believe?" If he has no answer to that question, we must conclude that he does not know what belief is in the biblical sense and that he is deluding himself in spiritual matters.

Martha was not like this, however, Martha said, "Lord, I believe." Then she immediately went on to say what she believed: "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." This confession has three points, but the most important thing to be said is that all three points have to do with Jesus. In other words, he himself is the content of her confession. There are other matters in the Christian faith, of course. But in a sense they all focus in Christ, so that he really is the content of Christianity. Therefore, in this as in the matter of the basis of Christian faith Martha becomes a valuable guide for ourselves and our contemporaries.

God's Messiah

First of all, then, Martha expressed belief that Jesus is "the Christ." *Christ* means "Messiah," or "the Anointed One." So, by saying this, Martha was affirming that Jesus was the one prophesied to appear in the end time as God's specially appointed servant.

We must admit that there were different expectations in Judaism regarding the Messiah, just as there are different views regarding him by Jewish thinkers today. Some expected an otherworldly Messiah. Some expected a great teacher. The society that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls is an example of this. Still others, perhaps the majority, expected

a political or warlike Messiah whose primary work would be to drive out the Romans who then occupied the Jewish lands. Many such views were current, but the expectation that tied them together was the belief that one day God would send a specially anointed individual who would be the herald of salvation. Martha believed that Jesus was this anointed one, and so should we all; for it is through him alone that we have salvation.

Second, Martha called Jesus "the Son of God." By this she acknowledged his divinity. If you were to ask me how much about Christ's divinity Martha really understood at this time, I am not sure that I could give a firm answer; for she does not explain her own statement. Did she recognize that Jehovah, the God of Israel, was actually incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth? Did she know that he was the God-man, a totally unique person in whom all the attributes of God and all the attributes of man, except a sinful nature, were present and combined? I am not sure. I am certain that Martha wanted to confess his divinity in some sense, however. And I am certain that all these truths are implied in the general use of the term "Son of God" in John's Gospel.

It is important that Jesus be divine. For only if he is divine is he able to do that which he has been sent to do and that which we need. If Jesus is not God, then his words are to be trusted no more than any other man's. They might be right—in part—but we cannot build upon them. We cannot trust the question of our eternal destiny to his teaching. If Jesus is not God, then his death on the cross has no more meaning than the death of any other individual. It may have been courageous. It may be an example to others who are subjected to persecution and suffering. But it is not an atonement for sins, and those who trust in it are deluded. If Jesus is not God, then he did not rise from the dead; and those who preach the resurrection are of all men most miserable and are deceivers of others. If Jesus is not God, then he has not gone to prepare a place for his own, will not return again for them, and is not now present to guide and assist those who trust him. All this depends upon the affirmation that Jesus is fully divine. So this affirmation must be part of our testimony.

Finally, Martha confessed that Jesus is the one "who should come into the world." What did she mean by this? She meant that Jesus is the one who had been promised in the various Old Testament Scriptures and who had therefore come to fulfill them. Jesus is the one promised to the fallen and dejected Adam and Eve in the Garden, the one who should crush the head of Satan though Satan should wound his heel (Gen. 3:15). He is the seed of Abraham through whom all families of the earth should be blessed (Gen. 22:18). He is that prophet whose coming God foretold to Moses (Deut. 18:15,18). He is the suffering one of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 53), the crucified but resurrected one of the Psalms (Pss. 16:10; 22:1-18). He is the one who shall rule forever upon the throne of his father David (2 Sam. 7:16).

Do you believe that Jesus is all these things, as Martha believed that he was? If you do, a great consequence will flow from it; namely, that you will stop looking elsewhere for the answers to life, history, and salvation. Some people claim to be Christians, but they act like pagans where their lives are concerned. They say they believe in Jesus, but they do not expect him to help them. Instead, they trust science, politics, education, ecology, or whatever else seems to have caught the fancy of their contemporaries.

Understand that I am not opposed to such endeavors. We must have them. But they are not themselves the answer to society's problems. Shortly after his solution to the immediately pressing problems in the Middle East in the spring of 1974, someone said to Dr. Henry Kissinger, the secretary of state of the United States, "Dr. Kissinger, thank you for saving the world."

Kissinger replied, "You're welcome."

But Kissinger did not save the world, though he may have helped a bit. This is proved by the fact that the guns were soon sounding once again in new conflicts. Clearly, men can work toward solutions; but they can never provide final solutions. Only Jesus can do that. He has already provided the final solution to the problem of sin. He is the only answer to present peace and victory for the individual in this life. In time he

will return to solve all problems as he reigns on earth in righteousness for one thousand years. Do you seek solutions? Then this is where you should look—to Jesus, who is "the Christ, the Son of God," the One "who was to come into the world."

An Anchored Faith

Let me ask these final questions. Is your faith like Martha's? Is it based on a knowledge of God's Word, and is it centered in the person of Christ? Or is it without substance, without content, and therefore essentially no more than a state of your mind?

In India there is a tradition that some magicians are able to take a coil of rope, throw it up into the air in the midst of an open field, have a boy start climbing up it, and then have the boy disappear into the sky after which the rope falls back to the ground. It has been shown by many people that this does not actually happen. No one has ever seen it done. But it has become a persistent and fascinating tradition, much like our stories of Paul Bunyan or similar figures. This makes a good illustration of the nature of some people's faith. Their faith is like a rope coiled beside them. They are proud of it. If we ask what they intend to do with it, they reply that they are getting it ready and that when the time comes for them to die they intend to uncoil it, throw it toward heaven, and then climb it into salvation. If we reply that this is impossible, that faith must be attached to something, they object that we are unreasonable and that their faith could never be so limited.

True faith is different. This faith comes down from heaven, for we are told that even faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). In this situation faith comes close to the earth, but does not touch it. So we need only to lay our hand upon it and climb. It is not of man, for it is let down from heaven. It is not groundless, for it is fixed in God and in the truth revealed in his Scriptures. This should be the nature of your faith, as it was of the faith of Martha.

Chapter
142. Mary

John 11:28-32

We are going to look at an invitation of Jesus Christ that is not recorded in the Bible. It was spoken—we can read it between the lines—but not recorded. It is an invitation of Christ to Mary; and I want to study it for what we can learn from the bearer of the invitation, from Mary's response to the invitation, and from the way in which the invitation comes to us.

In this chapter Jesus had come to the area of Bethany, near Jerusalem, because Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, had been sick and subsequently died. By the time Jesus got to the area a great crowd of mourners had collected. So Jesus did not go into the city. He stayed on the outskirts. Word came to Martha that Jesus was there, so she went out to meet him. Jesus then had that conversation with Martha that is recorded in the central part of this chapter in which he reveals himself to be the resurrection and the life. At this point—although it is not recorded— Jesus must then have said to Martha, "Go, call Mary. Ask her to come to me." We know he must have said this because, as we are told in verse 28, Martha "went back and called her sister Mary aside. 'The Teacher is here and is asking for you.'"

I want to apply the invitation by pointing out that the Master has come and calls for *you.* Do you hear his voice? Will you respond to him?

High in the Alps, at the historic Saint Bernard Pass, there is a hostel that is run by monks. They keep the great Saint Bernard dogs there. In the last century, in the winter, when the snow would be coming down and the air would be so filled with flakes that a person could not see the trail, the monks used to ring a great bell so that the traveler who was making his way up the trail through the snow could almost be led to the hostel by the sound. That is what I want to do. I want to sound the bell. Life is sometimes so filled with the mist of afflictions or sorrows (or

whatever it may be) that we cannot see the way clearly. But here is a bell that all can hear and follow. Come to me! Come to me! It is the invitation of the Lord to anyone who will hear, leave present occupations, and come to him. To those who will hear there is the promise that if they will come Jesus will not cast them out.

The Messenger

First, we need to look at the bearer of the invitation, Martha. Martha is still in the story, as we can readily see; and she is still a prominent figure. Mary was quiet. But Martha seems always to have been prominent. She had met with the Lord Jesus Christ and had been given this task—to go and *call Mary.* And so she does.

There was a time—we read about it in Luke 10:40—when Martha tried to keep Mary from Jesus. It was the occasion of the supper in her home. Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet, learning from him. Martha was doing chores and was troubled. She asked Jesus to rebuke Mary. In other words, she tried to get Jesus to make Mary get up from his feet and go into the kitchen to help her. But that was before! Here Martha goes to call Mary to be with Jesus. What has happened? What is the difference? The difference clearly is that Martha herself has met with Jesus and has been stirred by his teaching.

Are you a Christian? "Yes," you say, "I am." Well, then, do you go to call others to Jesus Christ? Do you bear to them that invitation that first came to you? If you find yourself admitting, "No, I am afraid I do not," is it not that you have not spent sufficient time with Jesus and have not been stirred by him? You will never be a great soul winner unless you do spend time with Jesus. Unless you do that, all you will be talking about is a theory or doctrine. If you spend time with Jesus, you are talking about a person whose invitation you can bear to other people.

There is a second noteworthy thing about Martha's action. She called Mary *secretly;* that is, *personally* (v. 28). The story tells us that, and the action suggests it. For instance, when Mary arose quickly and went to Jesus, the Jews did not understand where she was going (v. 31). Clearly,

this is because Martha had whispered the invitation to Mary. When Martha came into the house, the friends must have been clustered around Mary. So if Martha had shouted in a loud voice, "The Master has come and is calling for you," they would have heard and would have understood. Instead, Martha must have whispered the message: "Mary, the Master is here, and he is calling for you." There is an important principle involved here. It is the principle of "one-toone" evangelism. I am not saying here that there is not a place for mass evangelism. Certainly there is, though even in mass evangelism the strength lies in the fact that God the Holy Spirit takes the Word to the individual heart. But I am saying that the best evangelism, the most effective evangelism, is when you, the individual Christian, take the Word of the Lord Jesus Christ to one who does not yet believe him.

If you do that, the actual words of Christ will help you. Years ago, when my wife and I were engaged in a Bible study ministry, we had a young woman attend who at that time had difficult marital problems. She and her husband had fights. As we understood it, they did not just argue; they actually hit one another. Sometimes she was bruised as a result. Christians had been trying to get her to our Bible study for a long time, and for one reason or another she had been unable to come. But on this particular occasion she came. We were studying Matthew. We had begun with chapter 1 and had by this time gotten to the Sermon on the Mount. We started to read, and the first Scripture that was read was Matthew 5:39. "Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." There was a long pause, the longest pause I have ever experienced in a Bible study. Finally the girl herself spoke up. She said, "I think I understand what this means. It means that if someone hits you and you hit him back, then he will hit you again. But if he hits you and you don't hit back, then the fight will end." We all mumbled something to the effect that this is true. Then she said something very profound. She said, "But it is not so easy to do, is it?" Indeed, it is not! So we had an opportunity to speak to her of the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to make such things possible and to heal relationships.

Let me give you another story of how God speaks to the individual. It is the story of a man who lived next door to a church in St. Paul, Minnesota, which was then pastored by one of my assistants. This man did not believe the gospel, and he did not want to go to church. In fact, he refused all invitations. However, one week the church had a series of special meetings featuring exceptional music. The neighbor heard the music and was so taken with it that he decided to go in and hear it. He said to himself, "I'll go, but I'll go just for the music. When it is over, I'll leave." So he went in and sat down in the back of the church. When the musical portion of the evening was over and the preacher was standing up to preach, the man tried to slip out, but he could not. The church was too full. He said, "I'll do the next best thing; I'll put my fingers in my ears so I can't hear him." So there he was with his fingers in his ears while the preacher was bringing his message. That sort of thing does not really bother God very much. He controls all things. In this case he sent a little fly to buzz around the man's nose. The man ignored the fly as long as he could. But finally that little fly buzzing around his nose got to be too much for him. He took his finger out of one ear and smacked at the fly. But as he did that the preacher said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what God says."

There is a third feature about Martha's activity. First, she called Mary. Second, she called her personally. Notice, third, that she did it on *orders from the Lord Jesus Christ.* Does that apply to us? Certainly it does! For we are under orders to take the gospel into all the world to every creature. This is our Great Commission, and it comes to every believer. It is not a commission to ministers alone. It is not a commission for missionaries exclusively. It is a command for all who know Jesus Christ as Savior. Furthermore, it is repeated many times. I sometimes make the point that anything that is repeated in Scripture is obviously of great importance. If God says something once, we ought to sit up and pay attention. But if he repeats it again and again, the truth should literally seize us and command our thinking. The Great Commission occurs at the end of every one of the four Gospels and at the beginning of the Book of Acts. So we should take notice. Our task is to take the gospel

to every creature and teach each one concerning Christ. This is what the Duke of Wellington called "marching orders for the Church."

Ears to Hear

Next, I want us to look at Mary's response to Martha's invitation, because Mary's response is a pattern for us also. If Martha's work in bearing the invitation is a pattern for Christians in communicating the gospel to non-Christians—which it is—then Mary's response is a pattern for what non-Christians should do when they hear the word of Christ.

What did Mary do? We are told, first of all, that Mary *ran* to Jesus. That is, she went to him quickly. In order to do that she had to leave the others who were with her. Other people are often a great hindrance to belief. Here was Mary, mourning in her home. Her friends and acquaintances had come, as was the custom in biblical times and still is to a large extent today. They had sympathized. They had surrounded her with comfort. They had brought in food. Mary could have said to herself, "Jesus has called me, but I have these friends to think of. What will they think of me if I leave them and rush off to Jesus?" Many people think that way today. They hear the gospel. They hear that they are sinners. They hear that they need a Savior. They hear that Jesus Christ is that Savior, and they even believe it. But they say to themselves, "What will my friends think of me if I become a Christian? My friends will say, 'What a fanatic he has become!' I don't want to offend them." So they postpone the day of decision, and the opportunity passes by. Do not do that. Do not let the opinion of others hinder you from coming to Jesus.

Moreover, do not even let them delay you. Not long ago, when I was speaking at a Bible conference, I was asked why I was not giving invitations. Actually I was. But the questioner was asking why I had not invited people forward or asked them to speak to me afterward. On this occasion I had a good way to answer the question. For just that morning, after I had concluded by asking any who were not Christians to turn from sin, believe in Christ and follow him, another man stood up

and asked people to come forward afterward. He thought he was giving an invitation. He said, "If you want to believe on Jesus, come and talk to us." But actually he was delaying the decision, for he was suggesting that the listener postpone his decision until after he had talked to a minister. I told this and then asked my questioner what he thought the best approach was. He acknowledged that the first was better. *Now* is the accepted time. *Now is* the day of salvation.

Someone once asked a little girl whether she obeyed her mother. She turned to her mother and asked, "Mother, do I always obey you?"

"You know the answer to that better than I do," the mother replied.

"Well, I never disobey you," the child said. "I always do what you tell me, but sometimes I go slow." Many people are like that with the Lord Jesus Christ. But not Mary! Mary ran to Christ immediately!

Second, Mary fell down at Christ's feet and *worshiped* him. This too should be true of us. When the Lord Jesus says, "Come unto me," and we do, our next act should be to fall at his feet to worship him.

Every time we see Mary in the Gospels she is at the feet of Jesus. In Luke, in the story I referred to earlier, she is at his feet learning from him. Here she is at his feet worshiping. On the third occasion she is at his feet serving, having broken over him the alabaster box full of ointment. That should be true of us. We sit at Christ's feet first to learn from him. Next, we fall at his feet to worship him. And then we serve him. Have you done that? Perhaps you have learned of Christ but you have not worshiped him. If not, you should acknowledge him as God Almighty, your Savior and your Lord, and then serve him, because we are called to do that also.

Finally, after Mary had run to Christ and had worshiped him, she *expressed her faith verbally.* This is what we find in verse 32: "When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' Anyone who reads this closely will notice that Mary said the same thing as Martha—"If you had been here, my brother would not

have died." But most persons who read closely will also recognize a difference in the cry. Martha had debated with Jesus. Mary fell at his feet, and her comment was made in the context of total trust and confidence. Mary's words meant, "Lord, you are everything; you can do everything. I trust you totally." Can you say that? Is that your confession?

He Calls for You

Let me sound the bell of the monks once again, as clearly as I am able. Martha called Mary by telling her, "Mary, the Teacher is here and is asking for you." Now the Teacher calls for *you!* Do you hear him?

Notice that he calls for *you,* not someone else but for *you!* You are the one who is to respond. Do you say to yourself, "I am far too unimportant for the Lord Jesus to call me. I am no one"? Mary was the no one of the story. She was the quiet one. The only thing she says in this entire chapter are the words we have here—"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Mary was the quiet, overlooked one. Yet Jesus called Mary.

Perhaps you say to yourself, "I am too important; I am too prominent. Jesus could not expect me to come to him." If you are saying that, I want you to hear this story told by Bishop John Taylor Smith, a former chaplain general of the British army. On one occasion, when he was preaching in a large cathedral on the text "You must be born again," Bishop Smith said by way of illustration, "My dear people, do not substitute anything for the new birth. You may be a member of a church, even the great church of which I am a member, the historic Church of England, but church membership is not new birth, and our text says that you must be born again." The rector was sitting at his left. He continued, "You may be a clergyman like my friend the rector here and not be born again, and you must be born again." On his right sat the archdeacon. Pointing at him he continued, "You might even be an archdeacon like my friend in this stall and still not be born again, and

you must be born again. You might even be a bishop like myself and not be born again, and you must be born again."

The bishop finished his message and went on his way. But a day or two later he received a letter from the archdeacon that read in part, "My dear Bishop: You have found me out. I have been a clergyman for over thirty years, but I have never known anything of the joy that Christians speak of. I never could understand it. But when you pointed to me and said that a person could be an archdeacon and not be born again, I understood what the trouble was. Would you please come and talk to me?" Naturally Bishop Smith did talk to him, and the archdeacon, important as he was, responded to Christ's call.

There are none too low or too high for whom the gospel does not apply. Nor are there any who do not need to hear Christ's call.

Chapter 143.
Jesus Wept

John 11:33-37

In reading the Bible I have often been displeased by the work of those men who divided the text into verses. Done for liturgical reasons originally, often it is harmless. But sometimes the divisions have made the text difficult to understand or have destroyed its meaning. The beginning of Ephesians 2 is an example of this; for the words "and you" (v. 1) rightly continue a thought found four verses earlier in chapter 1 and belong to it. In the division we have, the connection is lost. Similarly 1 John 2:1-2 really belongs with 1 John 1:5-10. There are other examples. There is a handling of one verse of the Bible by these men for which I have nothing but praise, however. The verse is John 11:35, our text for this and the next three studies: "Jesus wept." The text is only two words, which makes it the shortest verse in the English Bible. Yet it is of such importance that it rightly deserves to stand alone. Underline it! Mark it with red ink! Add an exclamation point! Print it in

capital letters! "JESUS WEPT!" Spurgeon, who preached two sermons on this passage in the course of his ministry, wrote, "There is infinitely more in these two words than any sermonizer, or student of the Word, will ever be able to bring out of them, even though he should apply the microscope of the utmost attentive consideration."

I agree with Spurgeon. We shall never exhaust these words. But let us try. If we do, we may well find John 11:35 to be a window through which we shall see into glory beyond. It is a small window; but if we place our eye close to it, we will see much. Let us look at these words for what they teach about the Lord Jesus Christ, about God the Father, about ourselves, and finally about the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for us, which is to be our example.

The first of these, what the words teach about the Lord Jesus Christ, shall concern us in this study.

Truly a Man

What do these words teach about Jesus? The first answer is that they teach us that Jesus was truly a man. Indeed, it is primarily as a man that he wept on this occasion.

There are other facts that reveal the full humanity of our Lord, of course. Many of them are physical. We read that Jesus was born of a woman, that he was wrapped in swaddling clothes. We are to suppose that he was nursed like other babies. We read in Luke that he increased in knowledge. The full text says, "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). We read that Christ hungered. This was true many times, obviously, but especially on that occasion when he fasted for forty days in the wilderness and was tempted by Satan to turn stones into bread. After the resurrection Jesus ate broiled fish and a piece of honeycomb to demonstrate that even then he had a real body. Jesus knew thirst. On one occasion, being wearied with his journey, he sat on Jacob's well and asked the woman of Samaria for a drink. On the cross he cried, "I thirst," and they gave him vinegar. Jesus grew tired. One time he was so tired that he fell asleep in

a wildly rocking boat, and even the wind and waves failed to rouse him.

The Lord's humanity is seen also in his emotions. At times he was angry, though he differed from us in most of our anger in that he grew angry without sinning in the process. In such times he denounced the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of his day, calling them "blind leaders of the blind," "whited sepulchres," "a generation of vipers," and "children of the devil." Jesus also showed pity, as in his compassion for the multitudes whom he termed "sheep without a shepherd." At times their hunger moved him, for he fed them in Galilee on at least two occasions.

These facts from the life of Christ all speak of his humanity. Yet we compare them with the verse before us and confess that they do not speak to us as this text does. Jesus wept! From this we know that his body had glands, as ours do—tear glands. And we know that he felt as we feel. What a Savior! He is a Savior who became as we are so that we might become like him. Can you not identify with such a One? Can you not love him? Hold fast to Christ's divinity by all means. A Savior who is not divine is no Savior at all. But while you hold to his divinity do not give up the fact that he is also truly human; for it is as a man, as well as God, that he presents himself to perishing men and women.

Acquainted with Grief

Second, the fact that Jesus wept teaches us that Jesus experienced grief, as we do. In this we find him fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy, for Isaiah said that he would be "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:3). It may be that Jesus could have come to this earth and died for our sin without having entered into the grief that we experience, but he did not avoid sorrow. We conclude, therefore, that, whatever our grief may be, Jesus knows of it and has entered into it.

We have a problem at this point, however, for the word that is translated "deeply moved" in most of our Bibles is one that is difficult to understand. It is the word *enebrimēsato*. Part of the problem is that the word occurs only three other times in the New Testament and that even

then it has a meaning that does not seem to fit this situation. We find the word in Matthew 9:30 and in Mark 1:43 and 14:5. In the first two instances it is translated "strictly charged," in the sense that Jesus strictly commanded a person whom he had healed to tell no one. In the third instance it is used of those who witnessed the anointing of Jesus with costly ointment by a certain woman and who were said to have "murmured" about it. Neither of these translations—"strictly charged" or "murmured"—seems to fit the context of John 11.

In each of these uses there does seem to be what William Barclay calls "a certain sternness, almost anger" to Jesus' expressions. And since this is true, some commentators have placed the idea of indignation or even anger in John's passage. They would translate the verse, "Jesus was moved to anger in his spirit." If we ask why Jesus should be angry, they answer either that he was angry with the supposed unbelief or hypocrisy of those who were weeping over Lazarus (so Morris, Plummer, Loisy, Hoskyns) or else with death, which he would have viewed as a tool of Satan and a great enemy (so Chrysostom, Zahn). It may have been that some of the weeping of the crowd was less than sincere, but this is not said or implied in the passage. Besides, whatever may have been the case with the crowd, it was certainly not the case that Mary and Martha were faking. So we reject the idea of anger, at least at the hypocrisy of the crowd. Anger may have produced shouts of an outraged sensibility, but it certainly did not produce tears on this occasion.

The other possibility is to translate the word in a way that suggests deep emotion. This is made possible by the fact that one other known use of the word *enebrimēsato* in the Greek language is to describe the snorting of a horse, as in the excitement of battle or under a heavy load. Thus—and this is far better than the former interpretation—Jesus may be said to have groaned with the sisters in deep emotion, emotion out of which an involuntary cry was wrung from his heart. This is the view captured by Phillips, who renders the phrase, "He was deeply moved and visibly distressed," or by the translators of the New International Version, who say, "He was deeply moved and troubled."

Some Christians have found this unacceptable, for they imagine that it is just not proper for Jesus to have been moved to such a degree, particularly by the grief of others. They say that he had to have been moved by something no less great or terrible than sin. But this does not satisfy me. I am willing to grant that Jesus grieved over sin, even more so than he grieved over death, which is the consequence of sin. I also grant that he was saddened by unbelief, as he was on that other occasion when he looked out over unbelieving Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). But how can these be separated from the grief of the sisters? And how can we read the passage without seeing that Jesus wept with them? At the least these items must be taken together—grief, sin, unbelief, death, sorrow. For, as Lightfoot says, "The expression used ... implies that he now voluntarily and deliberately accepts and makes his own the emotion and the experience from which it is his purpose to deliver men." Morgan writes, "He ... gathered up into his own personality all the misery resulting from sin, represented in a dead man and broken hearted people round him."

What does all this mean? It means that Jesus was acquainted with grief, as we are, that he understands it and is therefore able to comfort those who sorrow. The author of Hebrews knew this, for he commends the suffering of Christ to Christians as a point of identification. "For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb. 2:16-18).

It is not an impassible, insensitive, unmovable Christ that is commended to you and me in Christianity. It is One who has entered into our grief and who understands our sorrows. Are you suffering? He knows it. Are you in tears? He has been there before you. Are you distressed? So was he. But he went on to overcome these things so that we might overcome them. Meanwhile, he is One who understands you and to whom you may come.

Not Ashamed

This verse teaches us a third truth about Jesus. It teaches us that he was not ashamed to be human. Here we note that he could have repressed his tears rather than giving vent to them. He can do all things; he could have done this as well. Moreover, he could have given himself good reasons for doing it. He could have said, "If I show tears, my tears will be misunderstood; they will be taken as a sign of weakness." Indeed, this is exactly how some reacted; for it is what they meant when they said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind have kept this man from dying?" (v. 37). They interpreted his tears as a confession that he could do nothing. Or again, Jesus could have argued that it was foolish to cry when he was about to raise Lazarus. "Why weep now?" he might have pondered. "In a few minutes everyone will be rejoicing." I suppose, finally, that he might even have viewed his tears as inappropriate in that the whole episode was going to redound to God's glory (v. 4). But he did not use this excuse either. True, the miracle would result in the giving of glory to God, but that was still minutes away. Now the sisters and their friends were weeping; and if they were weeping, he would weep with them. Jesus knew how the story would end, but in the meantime he was not ashamed to be one with his brothers.

Identified with Others

This leads us to our fourth point. For not only does the weeping of Jesus teach us that he was truly man, that he was acquainted with grief, that he was not ashamed of his humanity; it also teaches that he was pleased to thus identify with his brothers. He could have remained aloof (as we often do), but he did not. Instead, he identified with us in all things, thereby becoming our example.

Why is it that we who are Christians so often fail to do this? Why are we so strong in our crusades against sin but so weak in our identifications with the sinner? Are you one who has launched a crusade? Are you disturbed, for instance, by the declining moral tone of our nation? If you are, I am glad. I wish you well. We need fighters and

prophets. But as you declaim against corruption do not fail to weep for those who are caught up in it. Does the current widespread visibility of homosexuality disturb you? Are you against it? Good! But as you strike out against homosexuality do not forget to weep for the homosexual. Are you troubled by the traffic in habit-forming drugs? Splendid! Fight it with every weapon at your disposal. But as you strike out at drugs do not forget to weep for the victims and even for those who victimize.

Os Guinness gives us a biblical example of this principle toward the end of his impressive book *The Dust of Death.* It is the example of Moses. Moses, you will recall, suspected that he was to be the liberator of the Jewish people. But the first time he attempted to liberate them it was from a position of privilege and superiority, and he was a failure. He was a member of the household of Pharaoh. He killed an Egyptian who had been beating an Israelite. But when he came back the next day he was rejected by the very people whom he was trying to serve. "Who made you ruler and judge over us?" was their question (Exod. 2:14). Years later, however, after he had chosen "to be mistreated along with the people of God" (Heb. 11:25), Moses was able to identify with them, to share their hunger, danger, and problems. And they followed him. In the same way, Guinness concludes, "It is when Christians have at least partially entered into the profundity of identification that the Christian community has been at its most human and most sensitive and that its message has been most credible and compelling."

Jesus Loves

Finally, the fact that Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus also teaches us that he loves. This is what the people of Christ's day saw in his tears; for they observed him and said, "Behold, how he loved him!" (v. 36). Did Jesus love Lazarus before that? Of course he did! He also loved Mary and Martha and the others. But it was his tears that actually got through to at least some of them and convinced them of his love. They knew that he loved when they saw him weep with the sisters over Lazarus.

Is there not in the story of Christ's tears that which will touch your heart and teach you to love him if you have never done so? Perhaps you are

one who has heard the gospel? You have heard it presented doctrinally and experientially and in every way the preachers and teachers of the Word know how to present it. But it has remained a theory for you. It has never become that which could touch your heart. Is there not something in the picture of the weeping Christ to reach you? He is God; yet he became man, entering into all the grief and suffering that you know, including tears; and then he died intentionally and willingly for your salvation. If this cannot reach you, what can?

Finally, you may be a Christian. If this is so, then let me ask if there is not in this picture of the weeping Christ that which will convict you of your own cold indifference toward the lost and compel you to bear the gospel to them. Our hearts are cold. We must admit that. But there is in Christ that eternal flame of true love that will enkindle them if we but expose ourselves to it.

We sometimes sing in our Sunday services "Oh, how I love Jesus," and we mean it, up to a point. But do we love him enough to show love to other people? Do you love him enough to leave the affluence of our country to cross the seas to a land where men are starving and in which even on your missionary allowance you will have to live without much that you are now accustomed to in order to present the gospel? Do you love him enough to be a missionary? Do you love Jesus enough to leave your suburban home—I will not say for good, but "once a week"—to cross your town to love and serve those whose state of life is not actually much different from those you might find in many foreign cultures? Do you love him enough to help an inner-city mission? Do you love Jesus enough just to cross the street to your neighbor in order to love him and win him to the Savior?

Humanity! Sorrow! Pride! Identification! Love! All are in these verses, and more besides.

Chapter 144.

Our Tears in God's Bottle

John 11:33-37

There is a strange law of biblical exposition that says that the longer the text to be taught, the shorter the amount of time necessary to deal with it. Or, conversely, the shorter the text, the more time necessary. I find that if I have only ten minutes to speak, I can, if necessary, deal with an entire book. I have done that on occasion. If I have only ten seconds, I can cover the Bible. In fact, I can do it now in just ten words. The message of the Bible is: "Man's complete ruin in sin/God's perfect remedy in Christ." Thus it is that a long text takes a short time. On the other hand, a verse as short as John 11:35—"Jesus wept"—takes weeks.

We have already had one study of this text, in which we looked at the words for what they have to teach us about Jesus Christ. But they can also teach us about God the Father, about ourselves, and about the love of Christ, which is to be the pattern of our love both for God and for one another. It is the first of these remaining subjects—the teaching about God the Father—that we want to turn to now. We can see how this follows from the fact that the text teaches us about Jesus; for if Jesus is God (as he is) and if Jesus wept, then there must be a sense in which we can say that God the Father weeps too. We must be careful how we say this, of course. I will introduce some qualifications later. Nevertheless, even with these qualifications, we must say that if Jesus weeps, then we are to learn that the God of the universe weeps in the sense that he cares about us, identifies with us, and shows us mercy.

A Compassionate God

We should notice before going further that this was a novel and even shocking idea in Christ's day, particularly among the Greeks to whom John was writing. Today, conditioned as we are by a culture that has taken on some Christian ideas and values, we find the idea of a compassionate God natural. Why wouldn't he be like this? we reason. But in John's day, among the Greeks, God was thought to be above all such emotions.

Barclay presents the situation well in his commentary, showing that to most pagan thinkers the primary characteristic of God was what they called *apatheia*. This is the word from which we get our English word "apathy," but it does not mean precisely what we mean when we see the word in English. "Apathy" means "a lack of feeling" or "indifference." *Apatheia* means a total inability to feel any emotion whatever. By it the Greeks meant that God could not feel anger, love, pain, disappointment, hope, or any of the other emotions that so totally make up our existence. How did the Greeks come to attribute *apatheia* to God? They reasoned like this. If a person can feel sorrow or joy, gladness or grief, it means that someone else can have an effect upon him; for it is someone else who causes these emotions. If another can have an effect upon him, it follows that he must also have power over him, at least for the moment. But no one can have power over God. That is impossible, and if this is so, then it must mean that God cannot have feelings. He must be lonely, isolated, compassionless. He can be approached through reason perhaps, but not on the basis of his love or pity.

The Jews should have had the right picture, for the Old Testament reveals God as a God of love and compassion. But even the Jews had lost this element as a result of the formal and legalistic religion that had been developing in Israel in the centuries before Christ's birth. Jehovah had become cold and distant, just as he had always been to the Greeks. But Jesus wept and thus revealed a God who enters into the anguish of his people and grieves with them in their afflictions.

A Suffering God

I wrote a few moments ago that I would need to introduce some qualifications in this whole matter of speaking of the sufferings of God, and I must do that now. For we must not think that we are saying precisely the same thing when we say we suffer and when we say that God suffers.

For one thing, when we suffer, weep, or grieve we never do so entirely in innocence. Our sorrows are linked to sin, and we are never entirely sinless in any situation. This is not true of God. If he sorrows with us, it

is because of our sin and its consequences and never because of some sin or shortcoming in himself. Second, when we say that God suffers with us, we do not mean that there is therefore a change in God, as though he were not suffering before but now suddenly grieves because of what we have done. In their aversion to this idea the Greeks were right. God *is* the eternal one. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. In God there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (James 1:17). So while saying that God enters into our suffering we do not mean that God has ever been surprised or has altered his feelings or plans because of anything we have done. Third, we must notice that, while we are told that Jesus wept on three separate occasions (at the grave of Lazarus, over Jerusalem, and in the Garden of Gethsemane), strictly speaking we are never told that God the Father weeps, either in the Old Testament or in the New Testament.

So we must be careful as to what we infer from John 11:35. We may say that God weeps, perhaps. But as we do we must remember that this is not true for him precisely as it is for men and women.

The Tears of His People

What, then, may we say about the tears of God? The answer is that we may say anything that is both suggested by the tears of Jesus and substantiated by other verses. Let me give a few thoughts on this.

First, we may say that *God notices our tears.* Nothing is more apparent than this in the story of Christ's weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, for the text tells us that Jesus wept when he saw the others weeping—"When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (v. 33). Jesus wept because he noticed their weeping. In the same way, many texts tell us that God the Father sees our tears. They tell us that he is not oblivious. They tell us that he takes notice of them.

One example of this is found in the story of God's dealings with aged King Hezekiah. Hezekiah was sick and about to die, and Isaiah was sent to tell him to put his house in order. Instead of doing this, Hezekiah began to weep. He cried to God, saying, "Remember, O LORD, how I

have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes" (2 Kings 20:3). The Bible says that he wept very much. What did God do?
Surprisingly we read that God spoke to Isaiah at once and told him to return to Hezekiah with a new message. "Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, 'This is what the LORD, the God of your father David says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. ...I will add fifteen years to your life'" (vv. 5-6). As we read the story we may feel that the king's tears were unwise, for the fifteen years he lived after this were not good years. Nevertheless, the point of the story is that God heard him, as he also hears us. In the same way, Job declared: "He hears the cry of the needy" (Job 34:28). Likewise, David testified: "The LORD has heard my weeping" (Ps. 6:8).

These last verses also introduce us to a further thought, for they really mean, not only that God knows of our tears but also that *he is touched by them.* Jesus was touched by the tears of Mary and the others; it is because of this that he wept with them. In the same way, the Father is touched. It is this that we mean above all when we say that God weeps with his people.

Here again a number of Old Testament texts are helpful. Job said, in the verse that we have already quoted: "He hears the cry of the needy" (Job 34:28). David wrote: "He does not ignore the cry of the humble" (Ps. 9:12). He said again, "The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry" (Ps. 34:15). Here are three verbs—hears, does not ignore, are attentive—each of which suggests that God is genuinely touched by our sorrow. Should we fear, then, to pour forth tears before him? Should we ever fear that, if we come to God earnestly, we will find him unmoved?

This should be a great encouragement in our prayers. Of course, we will not want to pray foolishly, as Hezekiah did. But neither will we want to pray coldly, particularly when it is another's interest that concerns us. Did Jesus weep before his loving Father? Then so can we. And we will find our tears effective. Spurgeon wrote: "No prayer will ever prevail with God more surely than a liquid petition, which, being distilled from

the heart, trickles from the eye, and waters the cheek. Then is God won when he hears the voice of your weeping."

Notice one thing more about our tears and the concern that both the Father and Son have for them. We have seen that God notices our tears and is touched by them. Notice also that *God remembers our tears* and that they are therefore precious to him.

In the Psalms there is a wonderful verse that expresses this truth in a metaphor; it has given us the title of this study. David is writing, telling on this occasion of the many griefs he has had as the result of the deeds of his enemies. They fight against him. They slander him, distorting his words. They hide themselves in order to fall upon him by surprise and destroy him. But, he cries out to God, "Put thou my tears into thy bottle. Are they not in thy book?" (Ps. 56:8 KJV). What is the bottle about which David speaks? We know that the Romans frequently had little glass bottles called tear bottles, in which they collected their tears. But that is not what David is thinking here. The only bottles he knew were large leather bottles, the kind that Jesus later termed wineskins. He is saying that God possesses such a bottle into which he puts David's tears. It is not that David presents his tears to God, as though to prove something. Rather, it is God who collects David's tears, and he does so in a bottle so large that he will lose none of them. In other words, God notices the tears of his people, is touched by them, and places them up in remembrance before him. If you are God's child, know that he treasures your tears and that he remembers them after you have long forgotten.

Tears Wiped Away

Finally, I want you to see that *God acts to remove our tears.* That is my fourth point. God notices our tears, is touched by our tears, remembers our tears; yes, but God also acts to remove our tears forever.

Here again, the example of Jesus is instructive. Suppose for a minute that the eleventh chapter of John had ended with the verse we are studying—"Jesus wept." Or suppose we should read, "Jesus wept and

returned to the area of the Jordan." That would not be much of a story. There would be no comfort in it. If that were the case, I doubt if John would have included the story in his Gospel. But this is not what happened. Instead we read that Jesus first wept, but then acted to raise Lazarus and restore him to his sisters. He wept, but he moved to remove the tears and bring joy to the sisters.

It is the same with the Father. He notices our tears, but he also acts to remove them. Thus, we read in the Old Testament, "For you have delivered ... my eyes from tears" (Ps. 116:8). Or again, "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy" (Ps. 126:5). Or, as in this verse from Isaiah, "He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces" (Isa. 25:8).

We should note that this last verse is picked up twice in the Book of Revelation, once in chapter
7 and once in chapter 21, to speak of the final blessedness of God's saints. There we read, '"These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes"'. ...I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes'" (Rev. 7:14-17; 21:2-4).

Do Something

So where do these truths end? They end with these conclusions. First, do not look at sorrow and death as an unbeliever might do, but see them

rather through eyes that have been accustomed to dwell on such promises. This does not mean that we will not sorrow. Sorrow is still sorrow; death is still an enemy. But it does mean that we must sorrow differently, our sorrow being mixed with faith and expectation. Thus, as Paul acknowledged, we will sorrow, but not as those "who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13).

Second, do not be afraid to feel with those who feel sorrow. What was proper for our Lord and his Father is not improper for us who are his servants. If Jesus wept for others, we may weep. Indeed, it is as we weep that we most identify with others and exhibit our right to speak the comforting word of the gospel to them.

I think of two great examples of this point, one from the Old Testament and one from the New. The Old Testament example is Moses, whom I have mentioned in another context earlier. Moses had learned to weep with his people, so much so that he was actually willing to be sent to hell if it could mean that they would experience salvation. The story is a simple one. Moses had gone up onto Mount Sinai to receive the law. But as he was receiving it the people who remained below in the valley were breaking it. God asked Moses to step aside while he destroyed them. Moses was horrified and frightened, horrified at the sin of the people and frightened because he knew that God meant business. He went down the mountain. He dealt with the sin. Then on the next day he returned with an offer that must have welled up from a heart nearly broken with grief. In Hebrew it is even choppy, and one sentence is incomplete. We read: "So Moses went back to the LORD and said, 'Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written'" (Exod. 32:31-32). Here is a cry from the heart of a man who so identified with his people that he was willing to be sent to hell if only it could mean their salvation.

The other story is from the New Testament. It involves the apostle Paul. He, too, grieved for Israel, and wrote: "For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel" (Rom. 9:3). Paul is saying the

same thing Moses said. Only, unlike Moses, Paul knew that the thing for which he was asking was not possible. This is what it means to be godlike or godly. It is to those who are willing to be like this that God most entrusts the work of spreading the gospel.

Chapter 145.
God's "Valuable" People

John 11:35-37

It is possible to examine a subject from different points of view. For example, the American Revolution can be studied from the viewpoint of what was happening in England or America in the eighteenth century or from the viewpoint of economics, political theory, or other matters. If it is studied from the viewpoint of England, it can be expected to throw light on such questions as:
What was England's relationship to the colonies at this time? What was King George doing? What were the policies of the court? Why were the cries of the colonists unheeded? If it is studied from the American perspective, the examination might tell in part how the revolutionary ideas originated, what the settlers desired from England and from their regional governments, and so forth. Each of these approaches is valid, and the answers derived will be valid depending upon the amount and quality of work done in each area.

In a similar way, the text we have been studying may also be looked at from diverse points of view. In fact, we have already looked at it from two of these viewpoints. The verse is John 11:35—"Jesus wept." It may be looked at for what it teaches us about Jesus, about the Father, about ourselves, and finally about the love of Jesus for us, which is to be our pattern in loving others. It is the third of these, what the text teaches us about ourselves, that will now be our subject.

In an earlier study I compared this text, the shortest in the Bible, to a little window through which, if we get close enough to it, we may see

much. At this point we may perhaps compare it to the hole in an old-fashioned pin-hole camera, in which the picture becomes sharp only when the hole is small.

What does John 11:35 teach us about ourselves? It teaches that we are precious in God's sight, that we have gotten ourselves into such a state that even God weeps over us, and that we need God. We need to look at each of these points carefully.

God's Treasures

First of all, the text teaches us that we are precious in the sight of God. In fact, this is one of the most obvious lessons of John 11:35, since it is only because we are precious to God that Christ weeps over us. Suppose for a moment that you are walking down a street in your town or city and that you step on a bug. Do you stop and cry over the bug? Not at all. The reason is obvious: the bug is not precious to you. In the same way, most of us do not weep over broken pottery, a torn shirt, a run in a stocking, a dented fender on the car, or thousands of other things. They may have value. Their loss may be an inconvenience to us. But they are not precious, and so we do not weep over them. On the other hand, we do weep over the loss of a friendship, the death of a friend, and similar heartbreaks or disappointments.

God considers us precious in just this sense. Moreover, in case we should miss the point through our slowness in understanding his actions, God actually tells us that we are valuable to him; not, to be sure, because of anything that is in us inherently, but because of what he has made us and will yet make of us.

Made in God's Image

Why are we precious to God? Here we get into an important area of biblical studies, for the answer takes us back to the earliest chapters of Genesis, where man is said to have been made "in God's image." This is actually stressed in Genesis so much that it can be said to be the most important characteristic of the man and the woman. It is what makes

them different from the animals and from the plants. Genesis puts it like this, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:26-27).

In speaking of the fact that man was created in God's image I have sometimes referred this to the three-part nature of man's being. We say that God is a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So when we say that man was created in God's image we mean that in an analogous way man is also a trinity. In man's case this means that he consists of a body, soul, and spirit.

We tend to think that the body is what differentiates man from God; we have a body, while he does not. But in view of the fact that God became incarnate in a human body in Christ, this is not as obvious as it might seem. Which came first in the mind of God, the body of Christ or Adam's body? Or to put it another way, did Christ become like us by means of the incarnation or did we become like him by means of God's creative act? I would say that we were made like Jesus. And if this is so, then our bodies are of great value and should be honored in the way we treat them. Indeed, we can say, as Paul does, that our bodies were made to be "temples" of God.

The soul is the part of man that we would call the personality. It centers in the mind and includes all likes and dislikes, special abilities or weaknesses, emotions, aspirations, and anything else that makes the individual different from all others of his species. Here again we are made in God's image. And here again what we do with our souls is important. Are they being trained to desire the best that God gives? Or do they wallow around in the worst things we know? Do they strive to think God's thoughts after him and so grow intellectually and spiritually and in every other way? Or are they captivated by sinful thoughts and values? In this area we are dealing with the fact that God has what we would call personality and that we have our personalities because of

him. It is because we are created in God's image in respect to our souls that we are able to have fellowship, love, and communication with one another.

Finally, man also has a spirit. This is the part of his nature that communes with God and partakes in some measure of God's own essence. God is nowhere said to be body or soul, but he is defined as spirit. "God is spirit," said Jesus. Therefore, "his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Because man is also a spirit he can have fellowship with God and love him.

Here, then, is a remarkable thing. Man is made in God's image and is therefore valuable to him.
God loves him, as he does not and cannot love the animals or plants or inanimate matter. Moreover, he feels for him, identifies with him, grieves over him, and intervenes to make him into all that he himself has determined that a given man or a given woman should be. We get some idea of the special nature of this relationship when we remember that in a similar way the woman, Eve, was made in the image of man. Therefore, though different, Adam saw himself in her and loved her as his companion and corresponding member in the universe. It is not wrong to say, therefore, that men and women are to God somewhat as the woman is to the man. They are God's unique and valued companions in the universe. In support of this we need only to think of the teaching concerning Christ as the bridegroom and the church as his bride, which we find throughout the Old and New Testaments.

One more thing needs to be added before we move on. We have said that man has been made in God's image and that this gives him value. We need to add to this that it is true even after the fall. Even in the state that man is in now he preserves something of the image of God and so remains valuable to him.

We see this in several places in the Bible. For instance, in Genesis 9:6, the verse that records God's institution of capital punishment as a proper response to murder, we read, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." Or

again, in James 3:9-10 in verses that forbid the use of the tongue in cursing other men, we find, "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ...My brothers, this should not be." Here the murder of another or cursing of another is forbidden precisely on the grounds that the other person (even after the fall) retains something of God's image and for this reason is to be valued by us as God also values him.

Evangelicals especially need to recognize this and proclaim it widely. It is not intentional, of course, but evangelicals often so stress man's sinful and depraved nature that they end in dismissing the value of man altogether. They look at men with horror-filled eyes and then cease to care for them. In seeing the sin, they lose sight of the sinner and cease to love him. Such things ought not to be. Indeed, if we allow them to be, it will be but a short time until we return again to the dark ages out of which only the Christian ethic, with its emphasis upon the unique value of man, has rescued us.

Some years ago in Philadelphia an expanded surgical team at the world-renowned Children's Hospital separated a pair of eighteen-month-old Siamese twins, Clara and Alta Rodrigues, who had come to the hospital from the Dominican Republic. We had a great deal of interest in this at Tenth Presbyterian Church, which I serve as pastor, because the head of the surgical team, Dr. C. Everett Koop, his first assistant, Dr. Louise Schnauffer, and the head of the anesthesiology team, Dr. Eugene Betts, were members of the church. This operation involved eighteen doctors and five nurses, just for the operation itself. And in addition to this there was a week of tests and at least a month or two of postoperative care. The family came from the poorest area of their country. Literally, they had no income at all. If they had need of something, they would take some of their homegrown vegetables down to the village and exchange them for what they needed. Yet here was an operation done on their children by the best pediatric surgeons in the world at a cost which observers placed at upward of $100,000, yet was cost free to them.

What produces such compassion, such effort? It is not the so-called "spirit" of Western man. For at one time babies like these would have

been discarded on a remote hillside to die from exposure or from the ravages of beasts. Or, to bring it closer to home, it is not so long ago that they would have been placed in circuses so that some unscrupulous promoter could make money at their expense. What accounts for this effort? The only adequate answer is the inherent value of man revealed to him by God through Judaism and Christianity and now embodied, at least for a time, in the best of Western ideals and institutions. Take away such a revelation and such values and the age of barbarism will return upon us.

A Shattered Image

We have dealt at length with the matter of man's value, the first of the lessons about man that the phrase "Jesus wept" suggests, because it is the most neglected. But it would not be right to deal with this subject without going on to point out also that man has marred God's image and is therefore in a state to be wept over. Thus, as I said earlier, the text teaches that we have gotten ourselves into such a state that even God, who might be thought to be above tears, weeps for us.

Do we need another example than that of Christ before the tomb of Lazarus? If so, we find one in an event that comes shortly after this in Christ's ministry. A few days after the raising of Lazarus, on what we call Palm Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. He had sent his disciples to find it; and when they had brought it to him, he sat upon it and rode toward Jerusalem while those disciples who were with him and those who came out of the city at his approach threw their clothes in his pathway and paved the way with branches stripped from the palms. In such a context we might expect Jesus to have been filled with excitement and even joy. We might expect him to have rejoiced in the fact that so many were apparently following him. But this is not what we find. Rather, we find Christ weeping, for he knew that the cheers of the people were shallow and that unbelief rather than faith characterized the multitudes that filled the city. Valuable? Yes, the people were valuable. But they were also so submerged in sin that their eyes were blinded to that which could have been their blessing and spiritual peace (Luke 19:4144).

It is a terrible thing, this shattering of the image of God in man. It is catastrophic both for the individual and for those with whom he is in contact. Paul tells about it in Romans, showing that sin has broken relationships—with God, first of all, then with others, and finally of the individual with himself. He puts it this way: "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen" (Rom. 1:21-25).

This should cause weeping. Indeed, as we look at man through God's eyes, our text should be Ecclesiastes 3:4, which tells us that there is "a time to weep." Or perhaps Luke 23:28, which contains Christ's words to the women of Jerusalem as they followed him on his way to the cross: "Do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children."

A Needy People

My final point is that we need God. We are valuable to God, yes. But we are so marred by sin, so unable to extricate ourselves from the bondage into which our sin has plunged us, that there is no hope for any of us unless God saves us. Here is the unique quality of Christ's tears at the tomb of Lazarus. If the situation had been redeemable by human effort, Christ would not have wept. If sin could have been overcome or if death, the product of sin, could have been eradicated, we should expect Jesus to have said, "Dry your tears. Stop feeling sorry for yourselves. Get on with the work. Solve your problems." But he does not do that. Instead he weeps, because from man's point of view man is hopeless and his problems unsolvable.

But with God all things are possible. Jesus says to Martha just five verses later, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" (v. 40).

Martha did see God's glory, for her brother was raised. But so do all who come to Christ as their Savior. We need him. Sin, suffering, and death ably testify to that. But God in Christ is able to meet our need; indeed, he has met it, for he has given his life and then been raised from the dead in order to deal with the entire sin question.

Isaiah told about it a thousand years before Christ was born, stressing that we who had been made in his image so bruised and battered him that physically, at least, his image became even more deformed than our own; but he endured this and all suffering in order that he might restore in us that perfect image of God that we had before we rebelled against him. "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). Here is the ability and great love of our God. For these and only these take us from the depths of our sin and restore to us that lost image of God, through faith in Christ Jesus.

Chapter 146.
"Behold How He Loves"

John 11:36-37

The last of our studies of the phrase "Jesus wept" brings us to the reaction of the spectators to Christ's tears. There were two reactions. On the one hand, there was the reaction of those who were obviously unbelievers. These thought that Jesus' tears were a proof of his weakness; so they concluded, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind have kept this man from dying?" (v. 37). These persons were surprised that Jesus had not been able to do something about Lazarus's sickness earlier, but they reasoned that obviously he had not been able

to help out or he would have done it. It did not even begin to enter their minds that Jesus was about to raise Lazarus from the dead.

The other reaction to Christ's tears was neither an expression of belief or disbelief. It was just an observation. These people looked at Christ's tears and concluded rightly that Jesus loved Lazarus. They said, "See how he loved him!" (v. 36).

Many people, perhaps most of those who will be reading these words, know the Lord well enough to know that he loves others. And most of these know that he also loves them. But if this is so, then it is surely right to take the text personally and say, "Behold how he loves us!" Or, to make it even more personal, "Behold how he loves me!" This is a cause for great wonder. Spurgeon, in an excellent sermon on this text, once wrote, "Most of us here, I trust, are not mere onlookers, but we have a share in the special love of Jesus. We see evidences of that love, not in his tears, but in the precious blood that he so freely shed for us; so we ought to marvel even more than those Jews did at the love of Jesus, and to see further into his heart than they did, and to know more of him than they could in the brief interval in which they had become acquainted with him."

Let us say, "Behold how he loves us!" and then think quietly over what we know to underlie that statement.

An Everlasting Covenant

As the eyes of our mind ponder all we know concerning Jesus, from the past to the present, where is it that we first see his love? Is it when we first became aware of his love? Or when he died for us? Or when he created us? None of these points represents a true beginning; indeed, there is no beginning. For as far as we can look back into the past we find him loving us. It was in eternity past that he so identified himself with us that he took up our cause and determined to redeem his fallen people.

In his divine foresight Jesus looked upon the race that, as yet, was not created and saw it ruined through sin. We see everything through the

blinders of time. For us life is past, present, and future. But it is not this way with God; he is above or beyond time so that to him, in some sense, all things are present. It was in this way, then, that Christ looked out upon what was to come and saw the ruin into which our sin would plunge us. Who was there in that moment beyond time to take our side, espouse our cause, and pledge himself to redeem that fallen temple? There was no one but Christ. As Isaiah wrote concerning God's search for a redeemer, "He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene" (Isa. 59:16). It was Jesus, then, who took up our cause.

Moreover, in that moment he also pledged himself to be the surety of his covenant people; that is, he took man's part in the creation of an eternal covenant between God and man, pledging to fulfill man's part. For he knew that the demands of that covenant could never be met by human beings.

The nature of God's covenant with man in Christ is seen in the record of a similar covenant that God later established with Abraham. In Abraham's day a covenant was sometimes made through a strange ceremony in which animals were cut in two along the backbone and placed in two rows over against one another, thereby forming a space in which the parties to the covenant stood while they exchanged their vows. The shed blood of the animals made the covenant particularly sacred. Since this was the form Abraham was used to, God used it in promising Abraham that he would bless him. In this case, however, there was one significant variation. Abraham became a spectator to the covenant—he was on the sideline seeing it in something like a dream or vision— while God, represented by a smoking furnace and a lamp, passed alone between the pieces. The point was that God was establishing the covenant apart from any participation on the part of Abraham. Therefore, it was unilateral, eternal, and undeserved.

In a similar way, Jesus established a covenant on our behalf and for our good, long before we were able to have any part in it personally. He pledged himself to die for us, thereby giving his life as a ransom and an atonement for our sins. The pledge was unilateral, for he did it by

himself and without our asking. It is eternal, for what he has begun he will most certainly bring to completion. It is undeserved, for we are lost in sin and therefore have no claim upon him. Moreover, it is sealed with Christ's blood; for we are saved, as the author of the letter to the Hebrews says, "through the blood of the eternal covenant" (Heb. 13:20). Jesus pledged himself to do what we could never do, so uniting himself with us that his death became our death, his life our life, his resurrection our own resurrection. And when did he do this? Before we were even born; indeed, before there was even a physical creation. So great was his love for us!

God's Servant

It also is true that in time the Lord Jesus Christ loved us enough to leave the glories of heaven and take the form of a man upon himself. In this form he endured all temptations, disappointments, and suffering that we are heir to. Paul writes about it in Philippians: "[He], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (2:6-7). This is the essence of the incarnation. It is one of the greatest wonders of all time; but it means, simply, that Jesus became like us in order that we might become like him.

How was he like us? He became like us in temptations; for the author of Hebrews writes that he "has been tempted in every way, just as we are —yet was without sin" (4:15). Have you been tempted? Are you being tempted? So was he; yet he was victorious over it. Now he reigns with the Father in heaven so that you might turn to him to find mercy and have grace to help in time of need.

Jesus also became like us in disappointments. A friend betrayed him. Others let him down. No one really understood him. His own countrymen, whom he had tried to help, killed him. Clearly, Jesus knew disappointments, but these did not defeat him. They did not make him bitter. Instead he triumphed over them.

He also knew suffering. Did anyone ever suffer as much as Jesus did? In a physical sense I suppose it is possible that some persons could have, though there are few forms of suffering as great as that endured in crucifixion. But in a total sense, that is, in a sense that involves mental and spiritual anguish as well as physical suffering, no one can match him. He who knew no sin was made sin for us. He who had never experienced so much as one second of broken fellowship between himself and the Father was separated from him so that he called out in great agony of soul, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" No other suffering was ever as great as his. Yet he endured all this, because his love for us was so immeasurable!

Our Sin-Bearer

This leads to our next point, for we may certainly say, "Behold how he loves us" when we reflect on his death by crucifixion. Jesus loved us so much that he became our sin-bearer. It is as Paul says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

I am sure that we will never understand the full extent of this action on the part of Christ, certainly not in this life. I even doubt that we will understand it fully in the life to come. For how can it be that the One who had existed with God the Father from eternity and who was himself God could become man and suffer even unto the point of spiritual death, so that he was actually made sin for us and was separated from his Father? I cannot understand it. Yet that is what the Scriptures teach, and I believe it. Moreover, I marvel at it. To look to the cross of Jesus Christ is to marvel at the extent of his love for us. We see there the height and depth of his love. We see the length and breadth of it. Does Jesus love us? Yes, he does. The cross is the proof of his love. He, who knew no sin, was made sin for us, so great was his love for us.

Christ's Call

Jesus also loved us so much that he called us personally and individually, persisting in his call until by the force of his love he drew

us to him.

Jesus died for us; that is true. But what was that to us until he called us to him? At best it was an exemplary death, but it meant little. When first we heard of it we were indifferent. If we had been in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion, we would not have intervened to save him, nor would we have thought much about it once the death had been accomplished. Now, after the passage of two thousand years, it has meant even less than a little. But Jesus pursued us. We failed to understand the meaning of his death, but he carefully explained it to us. We grew tired of the explanation, but he changed his methods of instruction and taught us differently. We said no to his call, but he would not accept our no. At last, when we could resist him no longer, we yielded to what Spurgeon called "the sweet compulsion of his grace." And we found him forgiving our sin, justifying us from all iniquity, adopting us as his sons and daughters, filling us with his Spirit, and imparting to us all the riches of his abounding grace.

Moreover, this is not just our experience of him in the days before we became his children. Even after we believed, his grace continued. For we were not faithful. He was faithful to us; but we each went our own way, despising his will and pursuing a course of sin marked out by our own stubborn hearts. If Jesus had cast us from him at this point, at least from the point of view of our sin, he would have been justified. But Jesus did not cast us off. Rather, he loved us even in our willfulness and strove by every means to melt our cold indifference and restore us to him. Sometimes Jesus calls loudly. Sometimes he calls softly. But always there is his call. So great is his love for us.

Do We Love Him?

Let us turn the statement around. Up to this point I have been writing of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for us and have called upon each one who knows that love to marvel at it. When we look at his espousal of our cause in eternity past, his incarnation, his death on the cross, his call to us to come to him, and his bestowal of all spiritual riches upon us, we

may well say, "Behold how he loves us!" But turn it around. Do we love him? Has anyone ever said of you, "Behold how he loves Jesus"?

Spurgeon asks that same question in the sermon I referred to earlier, and he answers it like this. "Listen for a minute or two while I tell you of what some saints have done to show how they loved their Lord.

"There have been those who have suffered for Christ's sake. They have lain in damp dungeons, and have refused to accept liberty at the price of treachery to their Lord and His truth. They have been stretched upon the rack, yet no torture could make them yield up their fidelity to God. If you have read *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, you know how hundreds of brave men and women, and children too, stood at the stake, gloriously calm, and often triumphantly happy, and were burnt to death for Christ's sake, while many of those who looked on learned to imitate their noble example, and others who heard their dying testimonies, and their spiritual songs (not groans), could not help exclaiming, 'Behold how these martyrs love their Master!' "There have been others, who have shown their love to their Lord by untiring and self-sacrificing service. They have laboured for him, at times under great privations and amid many perils, some as missionaries in foreign lands, and others with equal zeal in this country. Their hearts were all aglow with love for their dear Lord and Savior, and they spent their whole time and strength in seeking to win souls for him, so that those who knew them could not help saying, 'Behold how they love their Lord!' Some of us can never hope to wear the ruby crown of martyrdom, yet we may be honored by receiving the richly-jeweled crown from the hand of Christ as he says to each of his laborers, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant ... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.' "Then we have known some saints who showed their love to their Lord by weeping over sinners and praying for their conversion. There have been gracious men and women, who could not sleep at night because of their anxiety about the eternal welfare of their relatives and friends, or even of lost ones who were personally unknown to them; and they have risen from their beds to agonize in prayer for sinners who were either calmly sleeping, and not even

dreaming of their doom, or else at that very hour were adding to their previous transgressions ...

"Others have proved their love to their Lord by the way in which they have given of their substance to his cause."

These paragraphs by Spurgeon are a good statement of what others have done because of their great love for the Lord Jesus Christ, and they may serve as a challenge to us. But the question remains: Do *you* love Jesus? Has anyone ever said of *you,* "Behold how he loves his Master"?

Years ago a woman missionary went to North Africa and settled in Tunis where she began to try to win Moslems to Christ. She met with little success, as seems often to be the case in Moslem lands. But she persisted, above all continuing to love those to whom she was witnessing. One young Moslem lad came to her home every week for English classes. She had been giving such classes as a way of getting to know some of the Tunisians and of helping them. So, as she taught him English, she tried to tell him of Jesus. The student listened, but he was unmoved. Months passed. Finally, the summer before he was to go away to university came, and the lad dropped his classes. The summer passed. One day, just before his departure, the young man came to say good-bye to the missionary for the final time. The two of them had tea together, and the woman told of Jesus for what seemed to be the final time. Still there were no results. The Moslem was polite but adamant. At last the moment came for final farewells, and the student left the missionary's door and walked down the path leading through the garden to the outside gate. Here he stopped and looked back, and saw his teacher standing in the doorway looking after him with tears streaming down her face. He could resist no longer. Her tears conquered the rebellion in his heart, and he returned up the path and into the living room where he received the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior.

Could that be a picture of you? Could it be you, standing there in a foreign land weeping for the lost? Could it be a picture of you at home weeping for a husband, a wife, a son, a daughter, a neighbor? Such a

thing should be possible. For many should be able to see the tears of Christ in you and say "Behold how he loves Jesus!"

Chapter 147.
The Seventh Miracle

John 11:38-44

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is the climactic miracle of John's Gospel—by any standard of measurement. Its position in the Gospel alone indicates this, for it is the last of seven miracles and is inserted just before the beginning of the final week of Jesus' earthly ministry. The length of the narrative (forty-six verses) and its detail also reveal its importance; it is the longest and most elaborately described of the miracles. Only the miracle of the restoration of sight to the man born blind is of comparable length, but the miracle in John 9 is still shorter than this one. The results of this miracle are more momentous than those of any other sign, primarily in the increased determination of the religious leaders to eliminate Jesus. Finally, and most importantly, the deeper or spiritual meaning of the miracle is striking and is essential to the book's theology.

The first of the miracles in the Gospel of John is the turning of water into wine (2:1-11). It is a small miracle, as miracles go, but it reveals Jesus to be the true source of joy and of life in abundance. It concludes with the observation, "This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. Thus he revealed his glory; and his disciples put their faith in him" (v. 11). The second miracle is the healing of the son of a nobleman (4:46-54). It shows Jesus to have power over human sickness and, by extension, over that sickness of the spirit caused by sin. The third miracle is the healing of the invalid (5:1-16). Here the spiritual meaning of the miracle is obvious, for the invalid is an eloquent symbol of the helpless spiritual state to which sin has brought all men and women. The feeding of the five thousand (6:1-14) reveals that Jesus is "the bread of life." The story of his walking upon

the water (6:15-21) points to his power over nature. The sixth miracle is the restoration of sight to the man who had been born blind (9:1-41). This shows the effect of sin on the mind—the sinner is spiritually blind and walks in darkness—and the need for Christ who alone can restore sight. The story is summarized in advance in Christ's saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (8:12).

In each of these stories there is a real miracle, but it is told by John primarily because of the spiritual meaning found in it. The same is also true of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, the seventh miracle. Lazarus was certainly raised from the dead; in fact, as John indicates, it was the report of this astonishing miracle that led the religious leaders to the conclusion that they would have to dispose of Christ immediately. In addition to this it is also a picture of how a man or woman who is dead in sin is brought to spiritual life by Jesus. It may well be studied for what it has to teach about sin, faith, the power of Christ, and evangelism.

Believing Is Seeing

The story begins, "Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 'Take away the stone,' he said. 'But, Lord,' said Martha, the sister of the dead man, 'by this time there is an odor for he has been there four days.' Then Jesus said 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?'" (vv. 38-40).

The lesson Jesus had for Martha, and therefore for us also, is that in spiritual matters believing is seeing. He said, "Did I not tell you that if you *believed,* you would *see* the glory of God?" These words, "seeing" and "believing," sound natural to us because of the expression "Seeing is believing." But we can hardly miss the fact that Jesus puts it the other way around. "Seeing is believing," we say. "Believing is seeing," says the Lord Jesus.

Both are right so long as we realize that in our expression we are talking about human affairs while Jesus in his expression was talking about a relationship to God. In human affairs the expression means simply that

men and women are untrustworthy. Some are more trustworthy than others, no doubt. These are the ones we seek to work into positions of responsibility and authority, but even here we are not entirely believing. So corporation heads are bonded, builders are bound by contracts, union heads sign work agreements, and so on. Take as an example a case in which a personnel representative in a company is interviewing a young applicant for a job. "Do you think you can do the work?" the representative asks.

"Certainly," the young man answers. It is obvious that he does not lack confidence.

"Do you know what is involved?"

"Yes, I have read all about it. And, besides, I have had two years' experience doing the same thing in Phoenix."

"And did the job go well there?"

"Very well," is the reply. "And I know I can do well here." The personnel representative is probably pleased to see the young man's confidence. In spite of this he does not take his profession of ability at face value. Instead, he writes for references. Moreover, he does not promise that the job will be permanent even if he offers it to him. "We'll see how it goes," he says. In other words, seeing is believing; and this is right because in human affairs performance has not always followed promise. We want references. Or, to put it in other terms, we want collateral before the loan is made.

How then can Jesus invert the adage and say, "Believing is seeing"? There is only one answer: it is because he is not speaking of men but of God. Men are untrustworthy, but God is not like men in this respect. "God is not a man, that he should lie," the Scriptures tell us (Num. 23:19). God has never made a promise that he has not fulfilled fully. Consequently, to believe God is to put oneself in the place of blessing, from which one will certainly see all that is promised in due time.

Perfect Faith

Jesus' statement links "seeing the glory of God" (which refers here to the raising of Lazarus) to such faith. But the interesting thing about this is that Martha apparently did not have such faith, nor did anyone else so far as we can discern from the narrative. When Jesus said, "Did I not tell you... ?" he probably was referring to his message to Martha through the messenger, recorded much earlier in the chapter (v. 4). But when Jesus finally arrived at Bethany four days later, Martha did not expect the resurrection. Moreover, even after Jesus had talked with her face-toface she did not expect it. For when Jesus said, "Take away the stone," Martha replied that this would be unwise in that the body would undoubtedly have begun to decay. She did not expect a resurrection. She only thought that for some reason Jesus wanted to look at and mourn over the body.

The crowd that was standing by did not believe in the possibility of a resurrection either. For most of them were saying, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind have kept this man from dying?" (v. 37).

Where then was the faith that was to result in seeing God's glory? Again there is only one answer. If it is not seen in Martha or Mary or any of the others, the only person left in whom it can be seen is Jesus. He is the One who believed and who therefore saw God's glory. Consequently, his trust in God at this point becomes a model for our own.

What is it that makes Christ's faith in the Father what it is? Or, to put it in other language, what is the nature of Christ's faith? There are several answers. First, it is *personal*. That is, it is not faith in some abstract concept or some mere truth that Jesus knew about God. His faith was in God himself, which he indicates by calling him "Father." John records it this way: "So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, 'Father...'" (v. 41). Is your faith like that? Is it personal? Faith in the biblical sense most certainly involves propositions, but it is not propositional alone. It is faith in a person. Thus, regarding salvation we should be able to say, "Lord Jesus Christ, I love *you* and want *you* to be my Savior." Or in the matter of prayer, "*Father,* I lay such and such a need before you."

Second, the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ was a *perfect* or totally trusting faith. This is indicated by the fact that Jesus offered God thanks for the miracle even before it had taken place. We find him praying, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me" (vv. 41-42). I do not know personally how close we can come to that total belief of the Lord Jesus
Christ. Certainly we often fail to express confidence that God will hear and answer our prayers. On the other hand, we often pray in ways that are mere presumption. We fail, but we should still grow toward the point of such perfection.

Dr. Harry A. Ironside used to tell the story of one old man who had. He was a Scotsman who on one occasion was making his way by foot to a certain synodical meeting of the Free Kirk in Aberdeen. On the way, he was overtaken by a young theological student, also on his way to the meeting, and as they had much in common they continued on their way together. At lunchtime they turned aside to a grassy embankment to eat their lunch, first thanking God for the food. They had good conversation. Then, before they started out again, the old man suggested that they each pray, asking God for what they would need that evening. The young student was embarrassed; but he agreed, and the older man prayed. He had three requests. First, he reminded the Lord that he was hard of hearing and that if he did not get a seat well up toward the front of the meeting hall, he would get little from the sermon that evening. So he asked that a seat be kept for him. Second, he told the Lord that his shoes were badly worn and that they were hardly fit for the city. He needed a new pair, although he did not have money to buy them. Finally, he asked for a place to sleep that night, for he knew no one in the city from whom he could seek accommodations. As he made each request the old man thanked the Lord in advance for answering them.

The theological student was aghast at what he considered to be the impertinence of the old man, and he determined to check up on him later to see what came of his prayers. That night they reached the meeting a bit late. The hall was crowded. There was not a seat left. The

student thought, "We will see now what becomes of such prayers." However, someone came out, and the old man managed to squeeze into a place near the door, where he stood with one hand cupped to his ear.

Just then a young lady in the front row turned and saw him. She called an usher. "Sir," she said, "my father asked me to save this seat for him, saying that if he should be late I should offer it to someone else. Evidently he has been detained. Will you please go and offer it to that old man who has his hand to his ear and is standing just inside the door." The usher followed her instructions, and so in just a few minutes the first request of the old man had been answered.

The time came for prayer. In Scotland in those days some persons always knelt for prayer while others reverently stood. The old man was the kneeling kind. The young woman was the standing kind. Standing thus beside her guest and looking down she could not help noticing the condition of his shoes. Her father ran a shoe store. So afterward she politely raised the subject and asked the old man if she might take him to her father's store, though it was closed for the night, and give him a pair. So petition number two was answered. Finally, while in the store, the young woman inquired where the old man was staying that night; and he answered that God had not yet shown him the room. "Well," she said, "I think we have the room for you. The Rev. Dr. So-andSo was to use our guest room tonight, but he has telegraphed to say that he is not coming. Will you use it?" The next day when the theological student inquired how the old man had made out, he learned the answers and found that God is not indifferent to the believing prayers of his people.

Finally, we notice that the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ was *public.* That is, he did not express his faith quietly in a corner, but rather audibly and openly before men. In this respect we find him praying, "I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me" (v. 42). If we will do likewise, at least on occasion, then others may also come to believe as the result of our indirect testimony and God's action.

The prayer of Jesus leads to the moment of the resurrection itself. Having finished his prayer, Jesus called to Lazarus in a loud voice, so all could hear (Lazarus, of course, would have heard even if he had whispered): "Lazarus, come out." The story continues by reporting with great understatement, "The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go'" (v. 44).

Here is the climax of the miracle, and it is here that it must be applied spiritually. The resurrection of Lazarus happened. But we notice that it is also what happens spiritually whenever Jesus speaks to a lost and fallen child of Adam. According to Scripture, anyone without Christ is dead spiritually. He is "dead in trespasses and sins," as Paul wrote to the Ephesians. As such he is helpless. There is nothing he can do to improve his condition. But Jesus comes. He calls. He calls the dead one by name. And the one who hears his voice responds and rises from his grave to meet him. Perhaps he is calling you. Do you hear him? Will you follow?

Finally, the story says this to Christians: Will you also play your part in Christ's miracles? You say, "But what do you mean? Haven't you said that the work is Christ's alone? No one can raise the dead but Jesus." Yes, that is true. But have you noticed that although it was Jesus alone who could bring the dead to life; nevertheless, he delighted to involve the bystanders in the miracle. First, they were told to move the stone. Then, after the miracle, they were told to unbind Lazarus. True, we cannot bring the dead to life. But we can bring the word of Christ to them. We can do preparatory work, and we can do work afterward. We can help to remove stones—stones of ignorance, error, prejudice, and despair. After the miracle we can help the new Christian by unwinding the graveclothes of doubt, fear, introspection, and discouragement.

The miracle is Christ's. But there is work for us to do if we will do it. Will you? Jesus used
Ananias to reach Paul, even after he had been struck down on the road to Damascus. He used Peter to reach Cornelius. Philip preached to the

Ethiopian. Do you doubt that he would use you if you were ready to do such work? Then get ready! Or be ready! As Pink says, "There is no higher privilege this side of Heaven than for us to be used of the Lord in rolling away gravestones and removing graveclothes."

Chapter 148.
What Shall We Do with Jesus?

John 11:45-50, 53

The resurrection of Lazarus by the Lord Jesus Christ was over, and the people who had been standing by and had witnessed the miracle were left to wonder at it. What was to be their reaction? Would they believe on Jesus? Or would they fail to believe? Would they become his followers or his enemies? As we read the sequel to the story we are not surprised to find that both were true; that is, some believed, while others disbelieved. There were people who had come to Mary, and had seen the things that Jesus did and "put their faith in him" (v. 45). Their case reminds us of the report of the people of Samaria, who had come to Jesus through the testimony of the woman whom Jesus met at the well and who had then believed. They said, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Christ, the Savior of the world" (4:42). Theirs was a wonderful experience and an example. We would do well to be like them. Or again, we would do well to be a channel for faith, like Mary or the woman of Samaria through whom others believed. If we had more time, we could reflect on this profitably.

The story does not allow us to do that, however. For no sooner are we told that some believed, than we are also told that others did not. In fact, these did worse than merely disbelieve. These actually reported on Jesus to the authorities, who then held a council. We are told of them, "But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done" (v. 46).

An Evil Council

What a strange council this was! And what an evil one! We look at the action of those who had witnessed the raising of Lazarus, then went and told the Pharisees, and we say, "How could they show such ill-will toward Jesus? How could they be so hateful to him and so impervious to his miracles?" But then we look at those to whom they reported, and the hatred of the first group seems mild by comparison. Presumably the bystanders reported to the Pharisees who in turn informed the Sadducees, who then called a meeting (either officially or unofficially) of the great Sanhedrin, the supreme governing body of the nation. Here were the best men of the nation—at least in their own opinion. There were chief priests in their robes; the chief priests were all Sadducees. There were Pharisees, the "holiest" men of all, in their phylacteries. These met in holy council. No doubt they opened their meeting with prayer. Yet, what were they meeting for? They were meeting to oppose a perfectly innocent man. He was a man who had been doing great miracles, so great in fact that a proper council would have been one on how to encourage his work and lead multitudes to follow him.

It was an unlikely coalition. The Pharisees, strictly speaking, were not a political party at all, though they had political power because they were so highly regarded. Actually, they were a religious party or denomination. They were concerned chiefly with observing each minute requirement of the law and with encouraging others to do so. They were sticklers for detail. One example of their outlook is seen in the objection of Nicodemus, who was probably a Pharisee, to proceedings in a council held earlier. Nicodemus is reported to have said, "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him and to find out what he is doing?" (7:51).

On the other hand, there were the Sadducees. These were not religious men, though some undoubtedly played at religion for their own ends. These were the politicians. They were wealthy and aristocratic, and they collaborated with the Romans to preserve their privileged position. These men had much to lose, particularly if there should be a civil

disorder; for that would bring swift intervention by the Romans. They compromised to preserve their position. If justice and civil order ever came into conflict, the Sadducees would always be found on the side of the Romans in preserving civil order.

The interesting thing is that these two groups were enemies or rivals. That is, they hated each other and often opposed each other bitterly. Yet —and this is the wonder—we find them working together here in their opposition to Jesus. Why was this so? Clearly because their opposition to Jesus was more important than their rivalry with each other. The Pharisees hated Jesus for his religious views; he exposed their sin. The Sadducees hated him for being a threat to their privileged position. But both hated him, and so they collaborated. A little later we find the same thing in connection with Herod and Pilate, who were also enemies but who made common cause in doing away with Jesus. "Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends — before this they had been enemies" (Luke 23:11-12).

The situation gives us insight into the hearts of sinful men and women. People would rather unite with their enemies than follow Jesus. Winston Churchill once said facetiously that if Hitler invaded hell, he was sure that he would be able to find a good word to say for Satan in the House of Commons. Many persons are like that spiritually. They will agree with anyone and work with anyone rather than Jesus. I hope it is not true of you. I hope rather that you have seen the folly of such an outlook and have come to him.

An Evil Discussion

We need to notice further that the council of the Pharisees and Sadducees, convoked with such an evil intent, proceeded next to equally evil deliberations. First of all, they muddled about in indecision. "What are we accomplishing?" they said. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will

believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (vv. 47-48).

The most striking thing about this discussion is its unintentional confession of Christ's strength versus their weakness. It is more striking in that it happens on several levels. For one thing, there is no attempt to deny the miracles. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs" was their testimony. There was an earlier point when these same men sent officers to arrest Jesus and admitted, after the soldiers had returned empty-handed, that they really did not know what he was doing (7:51). But now they do know, and still they deny him. One commentator has written, "They owned the genuineness of his miracles, yet were their consciences unmoved." Another states, "They admitted the miracles, yet opposed the Miracle-worker."

Moreover, they admitted that they had been powerless over a considerable period of time, for this is the effect of the question with which the discussion began: "What are we accomplishing?" The religious leaders were acknowledging that their efforts had for long been ineffective and that they were now at their wits' end. We might capture the force of the question by translating the sentences: "Look how Jesus is growing in popularity. What are we doing about it?" Implied in the question is the admission that a new policy is needed, precisely because the old one is not working. Jesus' plans were working, but theirs were not working. Their efforts were weak, but he was strong.

I said earlier that the fact that the Pharisees and Sadducees collaborated against their natural instincts to do away with Jesus reveals the nature of sin in the heart of man. That is true. But the same point is even more obvious here. Sin had formed them and hardened them. Thus, no matter what others did, no matter even what Jesus did, these men were determined not to believe on him. In fact, they would not even raise the question of whether his miracles ought not rather to be taken as evidence that he was who he said he was, or even that he was a prophet to whom they should listen. They had already shut their ears to such

issues and were only seeking a way to stifle his influence or eliminate him.

Does this seem extreme to you? Or foolish? It is foolish, of course, but it is not so different from what many do today. A number of years ago a lady was invited by a friend to go to a gospel meeting. "I am afraid to go for fear I will get converted," she answered. Imagine! She was afraid that she might get straightened out with God. On another occasion a minister said to a certain woman in his congregation, "I have not seen your husband lately. Has he lost interest in the gospel?" She answered, "Well, he is afraid to come; for when he comes and hears the Word, it takes him nearly two weeks to get over it."

What are we to do with such a one? Or again, what are we to do with you, if this is your policy? We will keep preaching the Word. But be careful that you do not slip away forever like these Sadducees.

An Evil Conclusion

What did they do? How did their council end? One of them, named Caiaphas, stood up and counseled sordid self-interest. He did not put it that way, of course. He said, as politicians always do, "We must think of the good of the people." But this is what he meant. He succeeded in swaying the council too; for it was on this level, the level of self-interest, and not on any high level of rule by law or the good of the nation that these malicious men were malleable. Caiaphas said (we shall return to his words in more detail in our next study), "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" (vv. 49-50).

I am impressed with how cleverly Caiaphas spoke. He began by dismissing all comments by all previous speakers. "You know nothing at all," he dogmatized. That is, "Everything said thus far is foolishness." Then, eloquently and simply, he advised that it was better that one man die (though innocent) than that all should perish. And he won! First, he won in the council. We read, "So from that day on they plotted to kill him" (v. 53). Second, he won before Pilate, for it was when Pilate

perceived that a riot was developing and that he could be held responsible before Caesar, and even viewed as an insurrectionist himself, that he released Jesus for crucifixion (John 19:12-13).

Expediency! That was the lever then, as it so often is today. It is in the name of expediency and self-interest that the most terrible things are done.

I am also impressed by the fact that this is not the end of the story. Indeed, we can hardly miss the point that this is not the end or that John especially tells the story as he does to suggest a different end from this beginning. What we have here is a remarkable case of high dramatic irony. Caiaphas had said it was better to kill Jesus than that the entire nation perish. But this is what happened anyway. The very events they dreaded came to pass. True, they eliminated Jesus—in one sense at least. But in the aftermath of the crucifixion and the gradual scattering of the Christians from Jerusalem, the revolutionary spirit began to grow with intensity in Palestine, a war broke out, and the Romans intervened to crush the rebellion. In that great war all the strongholds of Israel were overthrown, Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed, and the temple was left in ruins. In fact, as Josephus tells us, a plow was even drawn across the temple area to stress the desolation. How different events might have been if these men had received their Messiah! But they did not. They resisted him, and the sin of resistance had consequences. As Barclay says, "The very steps they took to save their nation destroyed their nation."

Since the destruction of Jerusalem took place about A.D. 70 and since John was writing about A.D. 90, according to conservative estimates, no one who read the Gospel in John's day would miss this irony. Moreover, they would not miss the irony inherent in a thriving Christianity either. The Sanhedrin had acted as it did in order to put down Jesus. "If we let him go on like this," they said, "everyone will believe in him." But what happened? Men believed on him. They killed him; but it was through his death that the gospel spread, not only throughout Judaism but to all nations (v. 52). Indeed, as John wrote

there were Christians in every major city and in every country of the empire.

You cannot frustrate God. You can oppose him, but only you will pay the consequences, as did these men. You may oppose him, but Christianity will spread. The Bible says, "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will be established" (Prov. 19:21 RSV).

Three Choices

So let me turn the story of the Jerusalem council around in order to address you personally. It began with a question: "What are we accomplishing? Here is this man performing many miraculous signs." Make this your question. "What am I accomplishing—what am I doing —with the Miracle-worker?"

There are only three choices for you, so far as I can see. The first is to try to ignore him. Many try this, of course. You may be trying it too. But if this is your choice, I do not believe that you get very far with it. Why? Because he does too many miracles. He did them then; he does them today. Do you not fear that if you "let him alone, all men will believe on him"? And if they do, what will you do? How will you survive in such a Christ-centered world? How will you ignore him when your daughter believes, your son believes, your husband believes, your wife believes, your father believes, your mother believes, your friend believes? How will you ignore him on that day when, as we are told, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10-11)? Can he be ignored? Is Jesus really One whom you can thus put down?

Your second choice is to oppose him. Many have taken this course too, as we know. Caiaphas was the first but certainly not the only or even the worst persecutor of the Nazarene. History is full of those who opposed the Lord Jesus Christ. But where are they? The church remains, but what has happened to the persecutors?

Not long after the persecution of the early Christians instituted by Caiaphas and the other leaders of the Jews, Rome also tried to stamp the church out. Under Nero the Christians in Rome were gathered up and executed as scapegoats for the great fire. Some were sewed up in animal skins and mauled by bloodhounds. Some were bound to oxen and thus torn to pieces in the arena. Many were crucified. Some were dipped in pitch and set on fire like torches in order to light the gardens of the mentally deranged emperor. Under Diocletian, several centuries later, churches were destroyed, sacred books confiscated, clergy imprisoned, and many believers forced to sacrifice to pagan gods by torture. But the more they were persecuted the more the early Christians thrived, until at last the gods of the heathen were overthrown and Christianity was accepted as the faith of the empire.

Can you oppose him? If you do, do you really believe that you will be successful? Will you not rather be in the deplorable company of those rulers who "take counsel together against the LORD and against his Anointed, 'Let us break their chains,' they say, 'and throw off their fetters,'" of whom we are told, "The one enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them" (Ps. 2:2-4)?

The last of the three choices is the only sensible one. You can believe on Jesus and follow him. "Follow him?" you say. "But he went to the cross. He was crucified. What is desirable about that?" That is true; his way is the way of the cross. But the cross is the way to victory, for it is only by losing life that a man can save it. It is only by following Jesus that the victory is won. If you reject him, you will not win. In fact, you will lose all that you have, as did the Jewish rulers. But if you believe on Jesus and follow him, though you may lack some things now, you will pass beyond that and share his glory.

Chapter 149.
Why Did Jesus Christ Die?

John 11:51-52

It is no exaggeration to say that, along with the resurrection, the cross of Jesus Christ stands at the center of Christianity. But it is also no exaggeration to say that few people really understand it. Few doubt that he died; indeed, all men must die. Few doubt that he died by crucifixion. But *why* Jesus died or what his death means is a puzzle to them. Why did Jesus die? As we might expect, the answer, being of great importance, is found throughout the Bible—in the illustrations provided by the Old Testament sacrificial system, in prophecies such as Isaiah 53, in narrative, and in explicit doctrinal teaching. But there are few verses that speak of the death of Christ as deeply and in as short a space as our text for this study.

In this text John says of the unwitting prophecy of Caiaphas, the high priest of Israel, at the time of the death of Christ, "He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one." This is John's comment on Caiaphas's prophecy: "It is better ... that one man die for the people" (v. 50).

Unwitting Prophecy

It is interesting and somewhat surprising, however, that a prophecy of the meaning of Christ's death should come from this source. For of all the self-seeking and ruthless men who made up the Sanhedrin in that year, Caiaphas must have been the most self-seeking and the most ruthless.

Generally speaking, those who attended the council at which the decision was reached to kill
Jesus were just distressed and confused. They confessed that Jesus was doing many miracles. They expressed their fear that unless something was done it was likely that all men would believe on him. But they did not know what to do. We can imagine them trying out various suggestions and then rejecting each one. There was one man in that group who did know his mind, however, and that was Caiaphas. Others may have been confused, but Caiaphas at least was not. "There is one

thing to be done," he said. "Never mind about the miracles. Never mind about his teaching. Never mind about his character. The man must die. For, every minute that he lives the danger to ourselves and our prerogatives is intensified." Caiaphas expressed this in terms of the greater good of the people, of course. Politicians always do. Nevertheless, his advice to the council was clearly pure self-interest and expediency. And it carried, for the decision was reached immediately to do away with Jesus (v. 53).

The amazing thing, however, is that John tells us that in giving his ruthless council Caiaphas prophesied unwittingly. For "being high priest that year he prophesied," John says. That is, unintentionally Caiaphas foretold, not only that Jesus would die but also why he would die and the scope of his atonement.

It does seem strange that the prophecy should come from such an evil source, then. But it does not remain strange when we look at it in the light of God's dealings with men throughout biblical history. Maclaren writes, "Did not the Spirit of God breathe through Balaam of old? Is there anything incredible in a man's prophesying unconsciously? Did not Pilate do so, when he nailed over the cross, 'This is the King of the Jews,' and wrote it in Hebrew, and in Greek, and in Latin, conceiving himself to be perpetuating a rude jest, while he was proclaiming an everlasting truth? When the Pharisees stood at the foot of the Cross and taunted Him, 'He saved others, himself he cannot save,' did they not, too, speak deeper things than they knew? And were not the lips of this unworthy, selfish, unspiritual, unscrupulous, cruel priest so used as that, all unconsciously, his words lent themselves to the proclamation of the glorious central truth of Christianity, that Christ died for the nation that slew him and rejected him, nor for them alone, but for all the world?"

We learn from this that God uses even the wrath of man to accomplish his purposes. Indeed, Jesus may well have said to the unscrupulous high priest, as Joseph did to his brethren after he had revealed himself to them in Egypt, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good

to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen. 50:20).

Some commentators have imagined that in verse 51 the evangelist shows himself to be in error and that, as a result, we have here one example of why the Scriptures may not be considered entirely trustworthy. John says that Caiaphas was high priest "that year." "But," they say, "the office of high priest was a permanent office, not an annual one. John is mistaken, and the Scriptures do contain errors." But this is not what John means. John knew as well as anyone that the high priests were appointed permanently. His point, therefore, is not that *Caiaphas* was high priest that year in the sense that someone else had been high priest the year before and that still another would be high priest in the year following. Rather, his point is that in *that eventful year* of the crucifixion of the Son of God, Caiaphas was high priest.

What an irony! What a tragedy! For this was the year in which the great "High Priest for ever" came and stood by the earthly high priest—the reality by the shadow—and by his sacrifice of himself for sin emptied the earthly priesthood and earthly sacrifices of all validity. Caiaphas did not even know it! Consequently, he lost not only his place and his nation, but his office as well, which henceforth passed to that One who alone is worthy of it and who is able to execute it perfectly.

A Vicarious Sacrifice

But Caiaphas did prophesy concerning Christ's death. In the first place, he told the nature of it.

From the human side it was a ruthless murder for political ends. The Sanhedrin, on the advice of Caiaphas, plotted to kill Christ in order that there might not be an uprising at the feast. This would endanger their privileges and power. Pilate consented to his death in order that he might not be accused of encouraging an insurrection or an insurrectionist. But from the divine side, which is conveyed to us in the prophecy, the death of Christ was a vicarious sacrifice for sinners. That is, it was Christ taking their place, dying in their stead, taking upon

himself the guilt and punishment of their sins, in order that there might be nothing left for them but God's heaven.

We must admit, of course, that the view of the atonement that is expressed in this verse is incompatible with many modern ideas about God and the nature of salvation. Some think the idea of a vicarious sacrifice to be at odds with what we know about God. "Isn't he a God of love?" we are asked. "How then can he require a sacrifice as the basis of man's salvation? Or again, why is one necessary? If God is love and if he is all-powerful, isn't it true that he can simply forgive men outright? Moreover, if this is so, then are we not justified in considering the idea of a sacrifice merely a carryover from an outdated, Hebraic worldview?" To this we must answer that God is not only love; he is also a God of perfect holiness and justice. Therefore, salvation must take place so that none of these attributes is violated.

We are also told that the idea of a vicarious sacrifice is inadequate and immoral. It is inadequate, we are told, because the suffering of one man for only three hours (however intense) can never be equal to the eternal suffering of even one sinner in hell, not to mention a whole race of sinners. And it is immoral, our opponents add, for it is unjust of God to punish one man for others' sin. The answer to these objections is that they do not take into consideration who was dying, nor all that was involved in his sacrifice.

After all, who was dying? Not man, though Jesus was a man and had to be to die, but God. God the Son was dying. Moreover, it was because of the love and holiness of God the Father that he was dying.

One writer puts it like this: "God is not only perfectly holy, but the source and pattern of holiness. He is the origin and the upholder of the moral order of the Universe. He *must* be just. The Judge of all the earth *must* do right. Therefore it was impossible by the necessities of His own being that He should deal lightly with sin, and compromise the claims of holiness. If sin could be forgiven at all, it must be on some basis which would vindicate the holy law of God, which is not a mere code, but the moral order of the whole creation. But such vindication must be

supremely costly. Costly to whom? Not to the forgiven sinner, for there could be no price asked from Him for His forgiveness; both because the cost is far beyond his reach and because God loves to give and not to sell. Therefore, God Himself undertook to pay a cost, to offer a sacrifice, so tremendous that the gravity of His condemnation of sin should be absolutely beyond question even as He forgave it, while at the same time the love which impelled Him to pay the price would be the wonder of angels, and would call forth the worshiping gratitude of the redeemed sinner.

"On Calvary this price was paid, paid by *God:* the Son giving himself, bearing our sin and its curse; the Father giving the Son, his only Son whom he loved. But it was paid by God become man, who not only took the place of guilty man, but also was his representative....

"He offered himself as a sacrifice in our stead, bearing our sin in his own body on the tree. He suffered, not only awful physical anguish, but also the unthinkable spiritual horror of becoming identified with the sin to which he was infinitely opposed. He thereby came under the curse of sin, so that for a time even his perfect fellowship with his Father was broken. Thus God proclaimed his infinite abhorrence of sin by being willing himself to suffer all that, in place of the guilty ones, in order that he might justly forgive. Thus the love of God found its perfect fulfillment, because he did not hold back from even that uttermost sacrifice, in order that we might be saved from eternal death through what he endured."

Let me pause here to ask whether this is your faith and whether or not you know that you have entered into a right relationship to God through Christ's sacrifice. Do you know that he did indeed die for you, that he took your place so that you might never have to suffer the consequences of your sin and spiritual rebellion? Do you trust him as your personal Savior? If you cannot answer yes to these questions, do not let this hour go by until you have put your trust in Jesus. The testimony of the entire Word of God is that he was wounded for your transgressions, that he

was bruised for your iniquities that your chastisement was upon him in order that by his stripes you may be healed.

A Definite Atonement

There is more to the prophecy of Caiaphas than a mere statement of the nature of the atonement, however. For John goes on to say that his prophecy was that Jesus should die "not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God" (v. 52). This verse amplifies his previous statement; for, having informed us of the nature of Christ's death, he now likewise informs us of the power and scope of it.

On this point Arthur Pink is so excellent that I cannot forebear quoting him. He writes: "The great Sacrifice was not offered to God at random. The redemption-price which was paid at the Cross was not offered without definite design. Christ died not simply to make salvation *possible,* but to make it *certain.* Nowhere in Scripture is there a more emphatic and explicit statement concerning the objects for which the Atonement was made. No excuse whatever is there for the vague (we should say, unscriptural) views, now so sadly prevalent in Christendom, concerning the ones for whom Christ died. To say that He died for the human race is not only to fly in the face of this plain scripture, but it is grossly dishonoring to the sacrifice of Christ. A large portion of the human race die *unsaved,* and if Christ died for *them,* then was his death largely in vain. This means that the *greatest* of all the works of God is comparatively a failure. How horrible! What a reflection upon the Divine character! Surely men do not stop to examine whither their premises lead them. But how blessed to turn away from man's perversions to the Truth itself. Scripture tells us that Christ *'shall* see of the travail of his soul and be *satisfied.* 'No sophistry can evade the fact that these words give positive assurance that every one for whom Christ died will, most certainly, be saved.

"Christ died for sinners. But everything turns on the significance of the preposition. What is meant by 'Christ died for sinners'? To answer that Christ died in order to make it possible for God to righteously receive sinners who come to Him through Christ, is only saying what many a

Socinian has affirmed. The testing of a man's orthodoxy on this vital truth of the Atonement requires something far more definite than this. The saving efficacy of the Atonement lies in the *vicarious* nature of Christ's death, in His representing *certain persons*, in His bearing *their* sins, in His being made a curse for *them*, in His *purchasing* them, spirit and soul and body. It will not do to evade this by saying, 'There is such a fulness in the satisfaction of Christ, as is *sufficient* for the salvation of the whole world, were the whole world to believe in Him.' Scripture always ascribes the salvation of a sinner, not to any *abstract* 'sufficiency,' but to the *vicarious nature*, the *substitutional* character of the death of Christ. The Atonement, therefore, is in no sense sufficient for a man, unless the Lord Jesus died for that man: 'For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, *who died for us'*

(1 Thess. 5:9-10)___ "For *whom* did Christ die? 'For the transgression of *my people* was he stricken' (Isa. 53:8). 'Thou shalt call his name JESUS: *for he* shall save *his people* from their sins' (Matt. 1:21). 'The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for *many'* (Matt. 20:28). 'The good Shepherd giveth his life *for the sheep'* (John 10:11). 'Christ also loved *the church* and gave himself *for it'* (Eph. 5:25). 'Who gave himself for us, that he might *redeem us* from all iniquity, and purify unto himself *a peculiar people'* (Titus 2:14). 'To make propitiation for the sins of *the people* (Heb. 2:17). Here are seven passages which give a clear and simple answer to our question, and their testimony, both singly and collectively, declare plainly that the death of Christ was not an atonement for sin abstractly, nor a mere expression of Divine displeasure against iniquity, nor an indefinite satisfaction of Divine justice, but instead, a ransom-price paid for the eternal redemption of a certain number of sinners, and a plenary satisfaction for *their* particular sins. It is the glory of redemption that it does not merely render God *placable* and man *pardonable*, but that it *has* reconciled sinners to God, put away their sins, and forever perfected His set-apart ones."

The Children of God

I am glad that John also wrote, "And not only for that nation" but also for "the scattered children of God." For that includes representatives from among the Gentiles and from our own time also. If Christ had died only for an elect company from among the Jewish nation, he would have been just; for he need not have died for anyone. If he had died only for people who lived in his own time and not for us, that would have been just too. But this is not the case. Jesus died in order that he might bring many sons into glory among whom are men and women from every tongue and race and tribe and nation. These he is gathering. It may be that he is gathering you into the company of his people at this moment.

Will you resist him? Why? He died for you. He loves you. In fact, he commends his love to you on the basis of the fact that he did in truth die for you. Receive him. Yield to the sweet prodding of his Spirit. And find that salvation that is indeed already complete in him and is to be the basis of your assurance before him forever.

Chapter 150.
His Hour Not Yet Come

John 11:54-57

The end of chapter 11 marks an important division in John's Gospel, second in importance perhaps only to the close of chapter 12. It closes what has been called by some scholars "the book of signs." According to these commentators, John is to be divided into four parts: the prelude and introduction (involving the whole of chapter 1), the book of signs (involving chapters 2 through 11), the passion narrative (chapters 12 through 20), and the postscript (chapter 21). Thus, the verses we are to study mark the halfway point in the Gospel and form a transition to the beginning of the last and most eventful week of Christ's ministry.

In my outline of the Gospel, the break at the end of chapter 11 is of less importance than the break at the end of chapter 12. For chapter 12 sums up the public ministry, explaining why as a whole the people did not receive Jesus; and chapter 13 introduces us to the entirely different and very private final conversations of the Lord with his disciples. Nevertheless, there is enough of a break at the end of chapter 11 to make the verses that we find here significant. For one thing, the verses reflect a great tension, a tension broken finally only by the dramatic appearance of Jesus in Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday. For another thing, they clearly summarize the point to which the three great protagonists in the final struggle had come. These protagonists were the people, the leaders of the people, and Jesus. Therefore, in summarizing the period of Christ's public ministry centered in the signs, we should look at each one.

The Common People

I have said that there were three great protagonists in the final struggle portrayed in the last half of John. But, strictly speaking, the people are hardly *great* protagonists. They are important. They figure in the action

in that the Pharisees and the chief priests proceed as they do because of their fear that if they arrest Jesus openly, the people will riot in support of him. Still, they are hardly *great* protagonists, for they seem generally confused. They are onlookers, spectators, as the majority of people have always been.

The situation was this. Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, and this was so spectacular and so public that the leaders of the people had proceeded to hold a council at which the decision was reached to arrest Jesus, bring him to trial, and execute him. Jesus, however, knew that his hour was not fully come. True, it was close at hand; within days he would go up to Jerusalem for the final time. Still, it was not yet quite at hand. So, with his disciples, he left the Jerusalem area to go to a place where he could not easily be found. The Scripture says, "Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publically among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples" (v. 54). This city (maybe the one named in 2 Chron. 13:19) was probably near Bethel and thus about fifteen miles north of Jerusalem near the wilderness country that divided the highlands of Judah from the lush Jordan River valley.

All this had happened on the verge of the Passover, however. And this meant that at the time when Jesus left the area of the capital, many Jews from throughout the country were going up to Jerusalem. Before they could attend any feast they had to be ceremonially clean. So, many came to Jerusalem early, with the intention of purifying themselves through the prescribed ceremonial washings and offerings. All this took time, so while they waited they apprently gathered in little groups and eagerly discussed the major topic of the hour. "Where is Jesus?" they asked. "Do you think he will not come to the feast?" The way they phrased the question indicates that they did not expect him to come; for they knew, as Jesus did, that the leaders had determined to arrest and execute him.

Surely this is a deplorable picture. True, they had not yet set themselves in opposition to Jesus, as the Pharisees and chief priests had done. But neither had they come out for him. Moreover, they were content merely

to observe the outcome, which they knew might well mean the execution of a perfectly innocent man—and to do it even while they went about the aspects of their ceremonial religion. What matter that Jesus was innocent? They would see what would happen, and enjoy it. What matter that he was God's own Passover who should that very week give his life for the sins of his people? It did not matter to them so long as they could enjoy their own Passover with its delightful ceremonies.

Do you think this is too hard a judgment on these poor sheep? Then what about this quotation from the Babylonian Gemara, dating in its edited form from about A.D. 550? The Gemara is the written commentary on the Mishnah. "Tradition reports that on the evening of the Passover Jesus was crucified, and that this took place after an officer had during forty days publicly proclaimed: This man who by his deception has seduced the people ought to be crucified. Whosoever can allege anything in his defense, let him come forward and speak. But no one found anything to say in his defense. He was hanged therefore on the evening of the Passover."

The Gemara is not inspired, of course. It does not even claim to be. The words quoted may be simply a justification of their action by the leaders. But there is no need to be skeptical of these words, and there is every reason to believe that this is precisely what happened. If this is right, then these people were interested in Jesus, even sympathetic to him, but they would not stick out their own necks in order to be identified with his cause. Moreover, they would even be religious while they watched him be crucified.

I think we see something similar to this today. Throughout America there are thousands of people who, while they are very careful about their church membership and about the details of Christian worship, nevertheless, being in their hearts unwilling to be identified with Jesus, in fact reject him. They may have been baptized. They may faithfully attend the Lord's Supper. They may even be church officers. But they will not come out for Jesus. So God looks down upon their empty rites

and pronounces them to be a curse, for they are that by which they bring down judgment upon their own soul.

The Rulers

The second of the protagonists who figure in the events of Christ's last week are the rulers. These were the chief priests and Pharisees, according to our text, and they had given a command that if anyone knew where Jesus was, he should tell them "that they might arrest him" (v. 57). These men were opposed to Jesus and were determined to eliminate his presence from their lives and land.

It is an amazing fact, but a true one, that the raising of Lazarus had intensified the hostility of these rulers to Jesus. We might have expected them to have been convinced by the miracles. At least we would expect them to have been curious. But neither of these things happened. Rather, instead of belief or curiosity, we find hatred. We have seen the same thing before, of course. At the beginning of chapter 5, where their hostility originated, we find that they were angered that Jesus had healed the invalid who had spent thirty-eight years at the pool of Bethesda. Why? Because he had healed the man on the Sabbath. They seem to have been entirely insensitive to the needs of the man and indifferent to the great wonder that had been performed by Jesus. In chapter 9 we find that they become even more angry at the healing of the man born blind. Again, it is because of the violation of their little rules for the Sabbath. They do not even marvel at the great healing. Nor do they rejoice with the one who had been so miraculously delivered from a long nighttime of darkness.

Notice further that these were not acts performed over a period of many centuries by many different men, or in far-flung regions of the Jewish state for which they might therefore be excused if they lacked certain knowledge. These acts were done either in Jerusalem or in the immediate area of the city by one man during a period of just a few years. What is more, they were amply witnessed by many hundreds, if not thousands, of people. Still they would not believe. What a picture of traditional religion—that is, religion without the divine life. It hardens

the heart, dulls the conscience, narrows the mind, and sets the will against the true God who is revealed in Jesus.

Are you one? If so, I fear for you. Far better to be an atheist, far better to be the most ungodly among the ungodly, than to be a hypocrite who masks hatred for the Son under the guise of a formal worship of his Father. Will you not fear for yourself? Will you not so shake for fear that you will turn in desperation to the Savior? Do not wait, if this is your status. Turn now. The days hurry on; the moment of grace may be fleeting. God grant that his grace might extend to you and that you might find yourself walking in the steps of Saul of Tarsus, who once opposed Christ but later served him, rather than in the steps of Caiaphas.

The Lord Jesus Christ

The third of the three great protagonists is Jesus. Yet he hardly seems to be a protagonist at this point, so great is his mastery of the situation.

Three factors contribute to that mastery. First, there is his knowledge of people and with that his knowledge of all that was transpiring. This is suggested at the beginning of the passage by the word "therefore." We are told that "Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publically among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert." What does it mean, "*Therefore* Jesus no longer moved about publically"? Simply that he knew of the decision of the council reported just one verse earlier. We have no reason to suppose that someone told him what had transpired. At least nothing like that is suggested. Jesus simply knew what was happening. No wonder John, who witnessed this, told us earlier, "But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man" (2:24-25). Nothing anyone has ever done has caught him by surprise.

Second, Jesus had a sense of God's timing. Jesus knew that he was to be crucified. He did not shrink from it. In fact, he prays just one chapter later, "What shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for

this very reason I came to this hour" (12:27). Though the hour was coming, it was nevertheless not yet come. So he waited. At the precise moment and with great determination he entered Jerusalem.

This leads to the third point: his courage. The people, as they waited in Jerusalem, concluded that he would not come. After all, a man would have to be foolhardy indeed to take on the whole might and authority of Jewish officialdom. Of course he would not come. No one could expect him to come to this feast, things being what they were. But the people had underestimated Jesus. He was not fearful. He was courageous under God. Consequently, when the time came for his appearance, nothing, not all the rulers of Israel, no, not even the hosts of hell, would hinder him.

Barclay, who notes the presence of a similar courage in those who follow Jesus, writes thus of Martin Luther: "Luther was a man who hurled defiance at cautious souls who sought to hold him back from being too venturesome. He took what seemed to him the right course 'despite all cardinals, popes, kings and emperors, together with all devils and hell.' When he was cited to appear at Worms to answer for his attack on the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church, he was well warned of the danger in which he stood if he went. His answer was: I would go if there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the housetops.' When told that Duke George would capture him, he answered: 'I would go if it rained Duke Georges.' It was not that Luther was not afraid, for often he made his greatest statements with a voice and with knees that shook; but he had that courage which conquered fear," which, we might add, he had learned from Jesus and in which many others, who have also known Jesus, share. Barclay concludes: "The Christian does not fear the consequences of doing the right thing; he fears the consequences of *not* doing it."

An Open Confession

This brings us to our conclusion and leads me to ask: Where are you in this summary of these three great protagonists? Each of us must be

identified with one.

To say that it is not your fight, that you are not for Christ or against him, that you have other concerns—these sayings put you in the camp of the common people who were sympathetic but who would not come out openly for Jesus and who therefore missed their moment. Jesus was there, but they could not decide either for him or against him. Thus, one week they were with the mob who welcomed him into Jerusalem with palm branches, shouting "Blessed is the King of Israel, who comes in the name of the Lord," and the next they were the mob that shouted "Crucify him! Crucify him!" These people do not make history. They are victims of history. Moreover, they are victims of their own sin and selfishness, for to such it is just too costly to be identified with him.

What is the cost if you or anyone else is to be identified with him? First, there is renunciation. When Jesus asked people to come to him, the simplest form of his call was "Follow me." But there can be no following without a previous forsaking of all that keeps you from him. The disciples had forsaken all. So they were with Jesus in Ephraim. But these who were in Jerusalem had forsaken nothing. Thus, they were not with Jesus and did not even know where they might find him. Some people are in these shoes today because they will not renounce their sin.

Second, to follow Jesus one must confess him openly. Jesus said, "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). Or again, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven" (Matt. 10:32).

If you find yourself in the great camp of the uncommitted and are disturbed by it, this is the way to move into the camp of Christ's followers. First, forsake all that can keep you from him. Second, confess him publicly. Will you do it? Will you say, "Yes, I have been uncommitted, but I will turn from my sin and my own plans for myself and will follow Jesus"? If you do, God will bless you. He will save you. The Bible says that "if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord,' and

believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Rom. 10:9-10).

What will happen if you do not confess him? Before long you will find yourself in the second category, the category of those who are opposed to Jesus. This will occur because it is impossible ultimately to be neutral. Eventually you will have to decide, and when you decide against him you will be among those of the opposition whose eyes are increasingly blinded and whose hearts are hardened.

On the other hand, what will happen if you do believe? You will increasingly become like Jesus.
You may suffer as he did. Jesus warned that his way would be costly. But you also will become like him in insight, timing, and courage—even in this life. You will amount to something. And you will know God's full blessing both in this life and in the life to come.

Chapter 151.
Memorial to a Woman's Love

John 12:1-8

We now begin a study of the most momentous week in world history, a week that began with the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth at Bethany on his way up to Jerusalem, where he was to be crucified, and that ended with the crucifixion itself on what I believe to be Thursday of the Passion week. No other week is quite like this week, not even the other most important weeks of biblical history. The week of creation is an important week, beginning with God's creation of light and ending with God's resting upon the seventh day. The first week of Christ's earthly ministry is also important. The fourth evangelist is even careful to highlight it in the opening pages of his Gospel. Nevertheless, these weeks do not compare with the block of seven great days with which John and all the other Gospels end. Nearly one-half of John's Gospel is

given over to a narration of the events of this week and what follows it (nearly two-fifths of Mark, over one-third of Matthew, and over one-fourth of Luke). And they are right to do so. For the events of this week were brought on by Christ's steadfast determination to go up to Jerusalem, to die for the sin of the world, and thereby to give his life a ransom for his people. The events of this week contain the anointing of Jesus at Bethany, the entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the cursing of the fig tree, the Olivet discourse recorded by the Synoptics, the final discourses with the disciples recorded by John, the Last Supper, the arrest, trials, and crucifixion of Jesus, and the embalming and burial of the body by Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus. After three more days the events of this week are climaxed by the resurrection.

Anointed for Burial

Knowing what this momentous week contains, as we do, we are not surprised to find that it begins with the supper given for Jesus in Bethany at which Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, anointed Jesus with spikenard, doing it, as Jesus said, "for the day of my burial." In actual fact, the burial was still six days away. But this was the moment at which Jesus was symbolically set apart for burial by the only one who really understood what was happening, just as in a similar way he was also set apart as God's great Passover Lamb on Palm Sunday.

John does not tell us all that happened as Jesus began his journey to Jerusalem for the final time, but we know some of the details from the other three Gospel writers. For one thing, we know that he did not return to Jerusalem directly from Ephraim, where we last saw him. If Ephraim was to the north of Jerusalem, as it seems reasonable to believe, Jesus could have returned directly southward, entering Jerusalem from the north. Instead of this, we know that he went east into the Jordan River valley, south to Jericho, and then upward to the west through Bethany to the capital. In Jericho, he had stayed with Zachaeus after the diminutive tax collector had climbed a sycamore tree in order to see him (Luke 19:1-10). As he left Jericho, he restored sight to blind Bartimaeus and his friend (Matt. 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52).

John does not tell us these things, however. He only tells us that "Six days before the Passover Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in his honor. Martha served" (John 12:1-2).

From Matthew and Mark we learn that this was held in the house of Simon the leper, a man whom Jesus at one time had undoubtedly healed of his leprosy. This supper was presumably a celebration for the raising of Lazarus or, if you will, a "thank you" supper; and, as such, it was a brave thing for the friends of Jesus to have done. We remember that the Sanhedrin had given an order that if anyone knew where Jesus was, they should report it to the authorities. To fail to do so would make them more or less accessories to his crime. Still Christ's friends held this supper and held it openly. As a result of it we know that Lazarus at least was placed in danger; for we read just a few verses later, "So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him" (vv. 1011).

What stuck out in everyone's mind concerning this supper, however, was not the presence of Lazarus so much, or even the bravery of Christ's friends. What the disciples remembered of this dinner and wrote about long afterward was the act of Mary who, we are told, "took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair" (v. 3).

One Who Knew

Our text contains a marvelous statement regarding Mary, for it tells us that she knew that Jesus was about to die. He was about to give his life for us on the cross, and Mary knew it. Moreover, she was the only one who knew, so far as we can tell. Jesus had tried to tell the others. Hours before on the way to Jerusalem he had told the disciples, "We are going up to Jerusalem ... and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise" (Mark 10:33-34).

But the disciples had not understood it, as becomes clear from their conversation with Jesus in the Upper Room (John 1314) and from their despondent, almost unbelieving reaction to his crucifixion. Only Mary understood. She had understood for some time. Now she broke her box of perfume over Jesus in order to show him that she understood.

How did Mary understand these things when the others, particularly the disciples, failed? The answer is: by being often in the place where we find her now. Where? She is at the feet of Jesus, anointing him and wiping his feet with her hair. Where is she always? At the feet of Jesus! Thus we find her there in the story of the supper held for Jesus in her own home, the supper at which Martha busied herself with much serving, and we find her at Jesus' feet in John 11, at the time of Lazarus's death. In each case Mary is at his feet worshiping him and learning from him.

May I suggest that if you do not know much concerning spiritual things, it is because you have not spent time at the feet of Jesus? Do you want to learn? Do you want to grow strong in a knowledge of God's will and ways? Then you must learn from Jesus.

You say, "But how do I do that? Certainly I cannot sit at his feet literally today."

That is true, but you can do the same thing through studying the Bible. In Hebrew idiom, sitting at one's feet meant only to learn from that person. It was the place of a child learning from a parent, or a pupil learning from his rabbi. Today we do the same thing by studying the Book Christ gave us and in which we find him. Do you study the Bible? Do you really study it? Some people would like to know it, but they will not discipline themselves for the necessary work. Years ago a young boy was riding with a well-known Bible teacher on a train enroute to one of the Bible teacher's meetings. The teacher was reading his Bible. The boy was reading the newspaper. Finally, the boy looked over at his mentor and saw what he was doing. "I wish I knew the Bible as you do," he remarked in a complimentary way.

"You'll never get to know it by reading the newspaper," the teacher answered kindly. The boy got the message, put the paper away, and began to read his own Bible. In time he went on to become a widely known Bible teacher in his own right. Not all will become Bible teachers. But if we are to learn anything about Jesus, then the words about Jesus are essential and we must study them. Will you? I could wish that every one of us might become followers of Mary in this important characteristic.

Love's Extravagance

There is another characteristic also in which we should be like Mary. We should be like her in her love, and that even to the point of extravagance.

Here we get close to the real motivation of this wonderful woman. For when we ask, "Why did Mary pour out this valuable ointment on Jesus?" we cannot really answer adequately that she did it just to show that she knew that he was about to die. Jesus knew that anyway, and she knew that he knew. No, she also did it for something much more simple and more sublime. She did it just to show that she loved him, understood his sorrow at what was coming, and wanted to identify with him in his sorrow even as he had identified with her in her sorrow and in her moments of joy. Did she succeed? Of course, she did. She had sat at his feet, looked into his eyes, and seen his sorrow. She had said to herself, "What can I do to show that I love him and that I understand what he is doing for us?" She had thought of her most precious possession, her ointment. She said, "I'll give him that." She had given it, and he (as is always the case) had understood. In replying to Judas it is as though Christ had said, "Stop annoying the woman, for she alone of all of you has understood what I am about to do and loves me for doing it."

Are you like Mary? Or are you like the Judases of the world, who criticize those who are bountiful in their love? What a contrast there is at this point! Judas's objection to Mary's action contains the first recorded words of Judas in the Gospels. They are a carping complaint:

"Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor?" Mary's first words are a trusting confession, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:32). Out of his greed Judas eventually sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver, an amount probably equal to 120 denarii. Mary gave Jesus an offering worth two-and-a-half times that amount. Judas kept the bag, from which he pilfered. Mary broke her box in order that all might be given to Jesus. Judas sought to turn attention from Jesus. Mary sought to turn it to him.

So who are you like? Judas? Or the one who gave her all for Jesus? Remember, as you think of this, that Mary gave her most valued possession. Your most valued possession will be different. It may be a comfortable home, a successful self-image, a bank account, a pension, a family, or a dozen other things. But whatever it is, the question holds. Could you (would you) give it for Jesus? Is there a way that you could employ it to serve him, or just to show your love for him? Would you let your children leave the standard of life that you have created for them, and of which you are so proud, to go into Christian work, perhaps in a distant unrewarding place? Would you leave everything to go yourself, if God should so lead you? Would you be able to use your substance to send others?

"But I would be throwing away all that I have worked for," you say. Yes, in a sense you would. At least, that is the way the world will look at it. But, on the other hand, you will be investing in great spiritual dividends with God. Such blessings bestowed on Christ out of love always come home to roost on those who dispense them.

We see this in the case of Mary. Mary had broken her box, giving her all. Then she stooped to wipe Christ's feet with her hair. From her point of view that was the end of the story. But John adds, "And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." How did the house become filled with that odor? It may have spread around all by itself, of course. But on the other hand, if Mary was also helping to serve (as I have no reason for doubting she was) and if the odor of the ointment was now in her hair (as it must have been), then the odor may well have

spread from her with the result that her gift to Jesus, given with no thought of herself, nevertheless became the means by which she shared the blessing.

Apply this personally. If you are not a blessing to other people, if seeing you does not make them think of Jesus, if your own life seems dry and unprofitable, then do what Mary did. Get down on your knees before Jesus. Give him your all. Do it now. Pour out your life before him. If you seek to hoard your life and substance, you will not be a blessing to others, and you will lose even those possessions in the end. "You will be saved," as Paul says, "but as by fire." On the other hand, if you give him your life, then you will become enriched yourself and will inevitably become a blessing to all about you.

A Lasting Memorial

There is one final lesson in the story though John does not bring it out verbally. At the end of the story in both Matthew and Mark, after Jesus has explained Mary's motivation in anointing him, the Savior goes on to say, "I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her" (Mark 14:9). Mary's act was to become a lasting memorial of her love for Jesus, and so it has. What the others did on that occasion has been forgotten; many of their names have even been forgotten. But Mary—well, Mary is remembered. Indeed, after the passage of two thousand years we are remembering her now.

Do you want to be remembered? Then do not build monuments, build love. Do not be stingy with your possessions, share them. Share yourself. Give yourself away. Jesus said, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35).

And one more thing: Mary loved Jesus and gave her all, but so also did Martha. She did not give her ointment. She had none to give, I suppose. As I read the story and try to understand Martha, I even suspect that Martha was not the kind of person who treasured perfume, or kept it for

a special occasion, as Mary did. Martha would not have valued the perfume, but she did value something. She valued hard work. That can be seen in every context in which we find her. So what is she doing? She is working. She is dealing in perspiration rather than perfume. But, more importantly, she is serving Jesus, and she is not complaining about it as she did formerly.

What a joy to serve Jesus! In any form! Ironside tells of an elderly man who had always wanted to be a preacher but who had no gift for it. He was a successful businessman, high up in his company. But he wanted to get involved in Christian work somehow. So he helped open up a small mission hall in the downtown area of one of our big cities. There, after the office had closed for the weekend, he would roll up his trouser legs and shirt sleeves, take a bucket of water and a brush, and clean the chairs and floor. No one in the company knew of his service. Besides, as is often the case when something is done well but quietly, no one even thought to ask who did the cleaning. One day a couple of men from his company went over to the hall on a Saturday to get some songbooks, and they saw him scrubbing. They threw up their hands and said, "Oh, we never knew you were doing this! You shouldn't do it. We will scrub the floor, or at least we will get someone else to scrub it."

The old man objected. "No," he said, "please let me do it. I want to do it for Jesus' sake" That is exactly it. "For Jesus' sake!" It is not so much what is done that is important, though there are specific things that need to be done. It is rather that it be done for Jesus and that it be done by those whose hearts are fully surrendered to him.

Chapter 152.
Inescapable Evidence

John 12:9-11

For those who live in America in the post-Watergate era there is no novelty at all in the idea of people trying to destroy evidence. The

Watergate tapes are themselves an example. The famous "eighteen-minute gap" is a further specific. In colloquial language we even speak of burying the evidence. If one is innocent, there is no need to destroy evidence. If one is guilty, this is at least one way of trying to avoid conviction and maintain a facade.

When we think of it we soon recognize that this is nothing new. For one thing, we do it ourselves. We try to cover over facts that present us in a less-than-favorable light. For another, we find similar cases from other periods of world history.

Here is a biblical example. "A large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him" (12:9-11). These verses tell us that as a result of Jesus' miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, Lazarus had become important as evidence that Jesus was right in his teaching and that the rulers of the people, the Pharisees and Sadducees, were wrong. The Pharisees and Sadducees were, therefore, seeking to destroy the evidence by killing Lazarus.

One Must Die

It is a sad picture in some ways; such things always are. But it is humorous too, when we remember that the decision to start killing people was reached after Caiaphas had first argued, "It is better for us that *one* man die for the people" (John 11:50). At that time it *was* one. But now the rulers are finding out that one will not do. Jesus is not enough. Now it is "Lazarus also." In time it will be Stephen and James and Peter and then the many other martyrs. Such is the course of trying to cover up evidence for a truth. It is as if the truth were an artesian well or spring. A person can try to hide it if it is a tiny stream. But sooner or later the water will come bubbling through, bearing dirt with it. The efforts to cover it up, no matter how great, will be wasted.

G. Campbell Morgan writes on this point, "Hostility to God as manifested in Christ, has been the characteristic of the world ever since [the days of Jesus and Lazarus], and it has ever been trying to get rid of him. How many have they put to death in the endeavor? Pilate probably thought he had done the business presently when he put Jesus on the cross. When he handed him over it was with a sort of sense of relief, that it was done with. Done with! Within a couple of generations the power he represented had to repeat the martyrdom of Jesus ten thousand times in Rome itself." That is the point (or at least one of two points) of this study: the evidence for the truth of Christ's teaching and of his power to change lives is undestroyable and therefore inescapable.

The other point, since I suppose that we should really separate them, is that those who are Christians *are* the evidence and should therefore be equally undestroyable and inescapable. Are you evidence of Christ's claims? Are you really? If so, you should be like Lazarus, whom we find in this story, and should share his experience.

An Irresistible Attraction

What is it that we learn about Lazarus in these verses? We learn several things, the first of which is that he had become an irresistible attraction. Jesus had raised him from the dead; now people were coming to Bethany, not just to see Jesus (whom most had seen before) but also to see Lazarus and hear his story. The text says, "A large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and they came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead" (v. 9).

I wonder if you are irresistible as evidence of the truth of Christ's teaching. I wonder further if you are really an attraction by which men and women are finding him. Are you good bait? Has your life been made so delicious by Jesus that others cannot resist biting and thereby getting caught by the greatest of all fishermen?

As I ask those questions I know you may have to admit that you are not irresistibly attractive in the sense about which I am speaking, and you may be concerned about it. If you are, let me point out the two things

that made Lazarus attractive and show how they apply to you. First, *Lazarus had been brought to life* by Jesus. He had been dead. He had no hope of making any physical recovery. Others, even his own sisters, Mary and Martha, had no hope of reviving him. But Jesus came and raised him from the dead. He had called with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out," and Lazarus had come out of the tomb still bound with grave clothes. Granted, none of us has ever been physically dead. We cannot say that we have been brought back to physical life by Jesus. But we have been dead spiritually. The Bible teaches this when it declares that we "were dead in transgressions and sins" (Eph. 2:1). Being dead, we were without hope of recovery, just as Lazarus was. Then Jesus came and called us, as a result of which we were made alive and rose up at his voice to follow him. This is the case of all who are Christians. This is what it means to be a Christian. It means to have been made alive by Jesus. Consequently, we too can be an attraction by which others find Jesus, if we have really been made alive by him.

Another way of saying the same thing is to say that ultimately it is not we who are attractive; it is Jesus. Therefore he must be in us if he is to attract others to himself through us. Is Jesus in you? Are you a thoroughly converted person? If not, remember what Jesus said to Peter shortly before his crucifixion. He said, "When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). This meant that Peter was in no position to help others until he had himself—after his cowardly denial of Jesus—turned again to Jesus and been changed by him.

The second thing we notice about Lazarus is that he was *with Jesus.* Indeed, John stresses this; for he points out that at the dinner given for Jesus in Bethany "Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him" (John 12:2). I can imagine Lazarus being constantly by Jesus in those days, so that those who came to see Jesus saw Lazarus and those who came to see Lazarus inevitably saw Jesus. Can anything be plainer? Put yourself in the place of Lazarus and then conclude: I will help others to see Jesus to the degree that I spend time with him.

It is easy to see why this is so; for those who spend time with Jesus become like Jesus, and Jesus is the true attraction. Ralph Keiper wrote that this truth was one factor in his own discovery of the secret of effective witnessing. Before this time, he had looked upon people as fish to be caught, and he was distressed that so many ungrateful people would not cooperate in letting him save them. He imagined, so he says, that their obstinacy would cause him to get an "F" on his report card in heaven. Then he discovered that his first job was not to win souls but rather to be like Jesus. He writes, "Turning to the Scripture, I was stunned by what I found. I discovered that my first duty was not to win souls for Christ. My primary obligation was to live for him in the daily tasks which were mine, so that the people with whom I came in contact might see God's salvation in action." After he had learned the secret of being with Christ and therefore of becoming like Christ, the "job" of witnessing became the "joy" of leading others to him.

I need to point this out in the opposite way too. I have said that as we spend time with Jesus we will become like Jesus and therefore become an attraction for him. But on the other hand, we will be like him only to the extent that we spend time with him. To put it in other words, our time of prayer and Bible study cannot be neglected.

Here I can profitably quote from Hugh Evan Hopkins's excellent little book *Henceforth.* "The practical side to victory over sin lies in the keeping of a Quiet Time with God. It is then that faith is fed and holiness cultivated and victories won. Nothing in the life of the Christian is more attacked than his times alone with his God. Yet nothing is more essential if he is to go forward in the spiritual life. Frequent interviews with his Master are the secret of abiding in him. All the saints of the past have been men who have made time to see their King's face. John Wesley and Charles Simeon were up by four in the morning; Bishop Ken and Samuel Rutherford are reputed to have risen earlier still; Lancelot Andrews spent five hours a day in his devotions; Gordon of Khartoum used to tie a white handkerchief outside his tent door during his Quiet Time and no one was allowed to disturb him." Hopkins acknowledges that such prolonged hours are hardly possible

for the average man or woman today, in our much busier times. But he adds, "The essential point is determination and sincerity of purpose rather than length of time. The closed door and the quiet spirit are what the Father requires of his children when they would meet with him."

One other truth follows from the fact that Lazarus spent time with Jesus. He became courageous. It was not easy to be courageous in such times, for the friends of Jesus as well as Jesus were in danger. But if they were near him, they could be bold even though danger threatened.

A Threat to Unbelievers

There is a second characteristic that we learn about Lazarus from these verses. He was a threat to unbelievers. In this case the unbelievers were the chief priests. We read of them, "So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him, many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him" (vv. 10-11).

There were two ways in which Lazarus was a threat to these men. First, they were threatened politically. The chief priests were the wealthy, aristocratic rulers of the Jewish people. They were not particularly religious, but they were successful. They were at the top of the social heap; they had much to lose. In Roman times a conquered people were often permitted great freedom in governing themselves, as the Jews were. But let an insurrection start, even a small civil disobedience, and at once the Roman armies cracked down. Usually they executed the insurrectionists and removed from authority those who had been responsible for keeping the peace. These were the days of Passover. Excitement was running high. The chief priests saw Jesus as the leader of a potential rebellion. Everything he did inflamed the situation, so they believed. The raising of Lazarus inflamed it most of all! So they determined to remove Lazarus as a political factor.

The one who spends enough time with Jesus will always become a threat to unbelievers, particularly those whose chief interest is in maintaining their own position, the status quo. This does not mean that believers in Jesus will become revolutionaries in the political sense, at

least not with violence. But it means that they will become revolutionaries in a far deeper sense, for by their values they will be a challenge to the established and selfish comfort of mere political authority. Christians have always been a threat in this sense, at least to the degree that they become like Jesus.

Lazarus was a threat to the chief priests in another sense also. He was a threat to their beliefs or theology. We must remember that the chief priests were all Sadducees and that, unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. It was the Sadducees who tried to trap Jesus with a problem regarding the seven brothers who had each been married to the same woman. They had asked, "Whose wife shall she be in the resurrection?" Here were Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection. Suddenly they are confronted with this unknown man Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead. What were they to do? Where could they turn? The irony of the situation is almost humorous, and John does not miss it in telling the story. For he refers here just to the Sadducees and not to the Pharisees and the chief priests as he had in recounting the results of the council earlier. These men were threatened politically, and they were threatened theologically. So, unless they could take decisive action both their power and the influence of their teaching would soon be slipping from beneath their feet.

There was only one course for them to follow. Since they would not believe in Jesus, the only thing they could do was seek to eliminate Lazarus.

Have you become a threat to anyone because of your testimony? If you have, you will know soon enough; for it is likely that you yourself will be threatened. Does your life challenge anyone through its Christlike character? Then prepare to be defamed. Does your testimony with its clear logic and unimpeachable experience strike home to the hearts of those who hear you? Then be prepared to be called a fool for your testimony. Does your love for the lost expose, as it must, the great hate and selfishness of the world around you? Then be prepared to be hated and even spit upon for Christ's sake. Do not be under an illusion as to

what it means truly to follow Jesus, for Jesus himself did not allow anyone to be deceived on that subject. He told his disciples that following him meant a cross. As someone has said, "He never hides his scars to win disciples." On the other hand, you can know that to be with him in his suffering is to be identified with him and to allow him to bring glory through you to his own name.

A Blessing to Many

There is one final thing that we learn about Lazarus from these verses. It is for this perhaps above all that Christ's enemies wished to destroy him. He was a blessing; for many, we are told, believed on Jesus because of Lazarus. Here was a man so much alive because of Jesus and so identified with him in discipleship that others believed on Jesus just because of him. The application is obvious. Has anyone believed on Jesus because of you? Can it be said of you, "On account of him [or her], many put their faith in Jesus" (v. 11)?

One year the missionary conference of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia was attended by four veteran missionaries. Two were a couple who had given more than thirty years of their lives to working in unevangelized fields in Africa. Another, together with her husband, has done pioneer Bible translation work in Mexico. The last had spent over forty years in Spain. These presented their work at a series of meetings and dinners during the week and then eventually returned to their fields. After they were gone I received this letter from a woman who had been a member of the church for many years and had attended the conference. She wrote, "In 1936, I started attending Tenth Church while in college and have followed ever since then the work of these three missionaries, who had just then left for missionary service. The Wolls have evangelized Kenya in that time. They have trained and sent out workers. They have established churches and Bible schools. Maria Bolet in that same time has been training Spanish missionaries in a Bible school and has sent those trained throughout Spain. She has operated summer camps. She has been persecuted, several times been put out of Spain, and then allowed to return. Now the children of her

earlier converts are attending camps, and the mothers are crying out for more camps. In that time the Lathrops have reduced a language to writing, have translated the New Testament into that language, and have evangelized the entire Tarascan area of Mexico. They have established an indigenous church there. I have pursued my profession at home and overseas and have a few years remaining, a satisfying career. But who will greet me in heaven when I arrive there and say, 'I am here because you gave your life to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ'? Who will count me such a blessing?"

I know this person well enough to know that she has been a blessing. Quite a few have come to know and trust in Christ as a result of her testimony. But the question still stands—for me and for you. Have you been brought to spiritual life by Jesus? Can others tell that you have been with Jesus? Have any believed on Jesus because of your testimony? God grant that this might be true of each of us, or that we will allow God to make it true as we spend more time with him.

Chapter 153.
The King Is Coming

John 12:12-19

With the exception of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, no incident from his life is better known than his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on what has come to be known as Palm Sunday. Yet, few incidents from his life are more widely misunderstood. For whatever reason— whether the love of mere spectacle, the requirements of church liturgies, or just the misreading of the Gospel accounts—the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday has been regarded by many as a last public offer of himself as King to the people of Jerusalem. Up to this point he had avoided allowing himself to be thought of as a King, so the argument goes. But now, with the hostility of the leaders of the people building up against him and with the

moment of his destiny rapidly closing in, Jesus makes one last attempt to gain a following. It is only when the Hosannas turn to demands for his crucifixion that Jesus abandons this plan and goes to Calvary.

Unfortunately for this view, the Gospels tell us that Jesus had already offered himself to Israel as King once, early in his ministry (Matt. 4:17). He had been rejected. Now he entered Jerusalem with an entirely different purpose.

He Came to Die

Why, then, did Jesus enter Jerusalem as he did on Palm Sunday? There are several answers to that question, the first of which is that he came to die. Here Mark's account is most explicit, for he tells us that Jesus explained this to his disciples just two days earlier, that is, on the Friday preceding the Passover at which he was killed. "They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. 'We are going up to Jerusalem,' he said, 'and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise'" (Mark 10:32-34).

Against this background it is certain that Jesus entered Jerusalem as he did, not to win over the people (the time for that had long passed) but rather to goad the Pharisees and chief priests into action and thus precipitate the events that he knew awaited him.

Scriptures Fulfilled

The second reason why Jesus entered Jerusalem as he did was that he might fulfill Scripture. To us this may seem like an inverted way of doing things. We think that Jesus, as God, should be bound by nothing. But Jesus did consider himself bound by Scripture as an infallible expression of the will of the Father, as many other Scripture-led actions

throughout his ministry also indicate. Thus, both Matthew and John refer to the prophecy of Zechariah in which was written, "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9). John tells us that the disciples did not understand this at the time but that they came to understand it later.

When Did Jesus Die?

To my way of thinking the most important reason why Jesus entered Jerusalem, particularly when he did, was to show himself to be our Passover. That is, he wanted to exhibit himself as our Passover Lamb who was to take away the sins of the world.

The making of this point depends upon the dating of the events of the Passover week at which Jesus was killed. So it is necessary to deviate from our main theme in order to deal with the problems of that dating. In the traditional view of this week Jesus was crucified on a Friday, which we call Good Friday, and was raised from the dead early on Easter Sunday morning. In terms of the Jewish calendar, this means that the Passover Sabbath was Saturday; so Saturday must have been the fifteenth of the month of Nisan. In this reconstruction Jesus therefore entered Jerusalem on Sunday, the ninth of Nisan, after a Sabbath rest in Bethany, was crucified on the fourteenth and was raised from the dead on the sixteenth.

The strength of the traditional view results from two factors; first, the length of the tradition and, second, the apparent placing of the crucifixion of Jesus on the day immediately before the regular Saturday Sabbath by all four of the Gospel writers (Matt. 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; and John 19:31). In spite of these factors, which are, however, not as obvious as they appear, the traditional view presents us with several major difficulties.

Most people who know anything at all about the Bible are aware of the first difficulty. It is the difficulty of squaring a Friday crucifixion with

Christ's prophecy that the Son of Man shall "be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40). It is true that according to Jewish idiom the phrase "three days" does not necessarily mean a period of seventy-two hours. It can mean merely one whole day plus parts of two others. But while this observation helps us in dealing with texts that actually say "three days," it hardly helps us in dealing with this important prophecy from Matthew. "It is possible that parts of one day and one night are involved, rather than three full days and three full nights; nevertheless, three periods of light and three periods of darkness must be accounted for. And this, regardless of anything else, is fatal to a Friday crucifixion theory. As one writer says, "Add to this indictment of Friday the statement of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, spoken on the afternoon of Sunday (Luke 24:21), 'Today is the third day since these things were done,' and the case looks black indeed against Friday. Sunday is not the third day *since* Friday."

The second difficulty with the Friday dating is one known to anyone who has attempted to sort out the events of the final Passover week and assign them days. On an average, about one-third of the Gospels is taken up with the events of the last week of Christ's life; we should rightly infer from this that the events of this week, being of great importance, are given to us fairly completely and in detail. Indeed, from the arrival of Jesus in Bethany, six days before the Passover, until the resurrection, every moment seems to be accounted for. Yet when the events of these days are pieced together one whole day, and possibly two, is lacking. One of the silent days can be explained as the preceding Sabbath, a day in which Jesus rested in Bethany and received those who came to see both himself and Lazarus. But what of the other day? Can it really be that in a week as full as this one was, one whole day is unaccounted for?

It should be noticed that the difficulty of accounting for this day has led no less careful a scholar than Frederick Godet to move the events of Palm Sunday forward to Monday, thereby compressing six days of activity into five. However, we cannot help also noticing that the same

effect can be achieved by moving the crucifixion backward a day to Thursday rather than by moving Palm Sunday forward.

One more difficulty must be seen before we attempt a solution. It is a difficulty of more recent development. The dating of historical events is a complicated and often uncertain matter, involving the days and times of solar and lunar eclipses and of new moons. But in recent years, thanks to the use of computers, much that was formerly uncertain is known. Thus, to give an example, as recently as 1973, a work entitled *New and Full Moons* by Herman H. Goldstine was published, from which it is possible to calculate the days of the week upon which the Jewish Passover had to fall in any given year during Christ's lifetime or thereafter. If this would establish a Saturday Passover and therefore a Friday crucifixion for any year near the time at which Jesus must have been crucified, it would be excellent support for the traditional theory.
But, in fact, it does not. Instead, the day before Passover falls on a Friday only in the year A.D. 26, which is too early, and in the year A.D. 33, which most scholars agree is too late.

What, then, are we to do with these problems? Is there a solution? I believe there is and that it is obviously *the* solution, once we get over the idea that the crucifixion must have been on a Friday, as tradition says. The solution is simply that two Sabbaths were involved in this last week of Christ's earthly ministry. One was the regular weekly Sabbath, which always fell on Saturday.
The second was an extra Passover Sabbath, which, in this particular week, must have come on Friday. In this reconstruction, Jesus would have been crucified on Thursday and would have been raised from the dead sometime before dawn on Sunday morning.

April 6, A.D. 30

What does this rearrangement do to the problems we have already encountered as a result of the traditional dating? In a word, it eliminates each one. First, it clearly allows for the required three days and three nights in the tomb in line with Christ's prophecy. Jesus had spoken of a period beginning with daylight and comprising the whole of three days

and nights, with the possible qualification that the opening period of day and the closing period of night need not necessarily be a full twelve hours. This is provided for as follows. Jesus died on Thursday afternoon about three o'clock; hence, the hours from 3:00 p.m. until dusk qualify as the first day. This period is followed by Thursday night, Friday, Friday night, Saturday, and Saturday night; that is, a total of three days and three nights in that precise order. In this scheme of things Jesus could have risen from the dead at any point after dark on Saturday evening. We know that he had been raised before the women got to the tomb at dawn on Sunday morning.

It is worth adding here that several minor points tend to reinforce this conclusion. For one thing, when the soldiers invented their excuse as to why they were unable to guard the tomb successfully, they ended up saying, "His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep" (Matt. 28:13). This would be a natural outcome if the resurrection and the subsequent opening of the tomb by the angels took place during the night.

The second area of difficulty for the traditional view is the absence of one whole day of activities during the final week. This too is overcome if the crucifixion is seen to have been on Thursday. In this scheduling of events we have the following:

Sunday: Jesus enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey after having first made arrangements to secure the animal. He goes to the temple and looks about, but as it is late he returns to Bethany, having done nothing.

Monday: Jesus returns to Jerusalem. On the way he curses the fig tree as a symbol of the barrenness of Israel and as a prophecy of what was coming to the nation. In Jerusalem he cleanses the temple for the final time and returns to Bethany where he spends each night of this week save the last.

Tuesday: On the way back to Jerusalem the disciples find the fig tree withered and receive Christ's explanation. In the city the disciples comment on the magnificence of the temple and are told that the day is

coming when it will be torn down. On the way home Jesus pauses on the Mount of Olives to give what has come to be called the Olivet Discourse concerning things to come. Prophecy seems to be the theme of this day from beginning to end.

Wednesday: Jesus sends the disciples to make preparation for the Passover that is, however, eaten that evening without the Passover lamb. Jesus is arrested that same night as he deliberately tarries in the Garden of Gethsemane on what would have been his normal trip back to Bethany.

Thursday: Jesus is tried and eventually crucified. The trial begins on what we would call Wednesday night (but which is actually the early hours of Thursday by Jewish reckoning) and is completed in the morning. Jesus is buried that evening by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea. The women observe where Jesus is buried and buy spices, but as it is now the start of the Jewish Passover (that is, the Friday Passover Sabbath that began at dusk on Thursday evening), they are unable to attempt to anoint the body until Sunday morning.

Friday and Saturday: The body of Jesus remains in the tomb. The women and disciples observe the two Sabbaths. Jesus rises from the dead sometime between the coming of darkness on Saturday evening and the coming of the dawn on Sunday morning.

The final difficulty with the traditional view is also easily answered in accord with the Thursday Passover theory. We recall that the day before Passover, the fourteenth of Nisan, did not fall on a Friday between the years A.D. 26 and A.D. 33. But how about Thursday? The answer is that the fourteenth of Nisan fell on a Thursday once during those years and that this one time perfectly fits the situation. The fourteenth of Nisan fell on a Thursday in the year A.D. 30, the most probable year of the crucifixion even by other measurements. Therefore, to put it in our terminology, the crucifixion of Jesus may be dated with some certainty as having occurred on April 6, A.D. 30.

Christ Our Passover

But what does this mean for the question with which we began this study, namely, why did Jesus enter Jerusalem as he did on Palm Sunday? Well, if the crucifixion, which we know to have been on the fourteenth of Nisan, occurred on a Thursday as I have just argued, then counting backward we find that Palm Sunday was the tenth of Nisan, which is important, because it was on that day that the thousands of Passover lambs that were to be sacrificed were taken up to Jerusalem and kept for three days in the homes of those who were to eat them.

Not all are aware how many lambs were involved. So it is necessary to note that there was a great number. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that one year a census was taken of the number of lambs slain for Passover and that the figure was 256,500. In other words, with numbers this large, lambs must literally have been driven up to Jerusalem throughout the entire day. Consequently, whenever Jesus entered the city he must have done so surrounded by lambs, himself being the greatest of lambs. Four days later, at the time the lambs were killed, Jesus himself was killed, thereby becoming the ultimate Passover lamb on the basis of whose shed blood the angel of spiritual death passes over all who place their trust in him.

Is he your Passover? Have you received him as your Savior? Say with Isaiah, "He was pierced for *my* transgressions, he was crushed for *my* iniquities; the punishment that brought *me* peace was upon him, and by his wounds *I* am healed" (Isa. 53:5). Truly, "we all like sheep have gone astray," but in accord with his grace "the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Chapter 154.
Christ's Hour Come

John 12:20-23

As a preacher and public speaker it falls to my lot to see a side of pulpits that congregations seldom see. On the audience side of the

pulpit there is usually ornamentation, perhaps a carved figure or a cross. On the speaker's side there are less glamorous things: buttons to push, wires to trip over, stacks of books, glasses, fans, heaters, squeaky boards, and so on. I have been in pulpits held up by hymnbooks. I have been in pulpits equipped with a clock—so the speaker knows when to stop. Sometimes there are signs: "The service ends at 12:00 noon" or "When the red light goes on you will have just two minutes remaining." Obviously, I am not always as impressed with the pulpits as I trust the audiences are with the messages that come from them.

There is one pulpit that I always remember favorably, however. It is the pulpit of the little chapel on the campus of the Stony Brook School, located at Stony Brook, Long Island. I suppose that there are times when the backside of this pulpit is filled with hymnbooks and glasses of water too. There may even be buttons. But I have never noticed these things when I have been there, because of something else. That something else is a quotation from the Bible, which faces the preacher as he stands to address his congregation. It is a short quotation, but an arresting one. It simply says, "Sir, we would see Jesus."

"We would see Jesus!" That is a good word for any preacher. I could wish that every preacher and teacher of the Word of God might have those words before him constantly as he prepares his messages and as he speaks them. But at the same time, the sentence is also a word for all who hear or read messages. Would you see Jesus? If that *is* the case, then in one sense you will never be disappointed; for you will find Jesus. I know that any given sermon may be disappointing. I have been in places where it is almost always disappointing. Still, you will find Jesus if you seek him. He himself said, "Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened" (Luke 11:9-10).

We Would See Jesus

I introduce our study in this way because the verse I have quoted—"Sir, we would see Jesus"— occurs in the midst of a story told in the next

few verses of John's Gospel, and it is this story we want to study. Interestingly enough, we are not told that the people who made this request actually did see Jesus, though I do not doubt that they did. Rather, we are told of Christ's reply to their question and, therefore, indirectly of the significance of the fact that they had asked it. The significance of the story for us lies in the fact that we will see Jesus when we properly understand his answer.

We do not know precisely when the incident that is recorded here took place, for John does not give us a time indication. From my reading of the other Gospels I doubt that it was on the same day Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, for on that occasion he seems to have returned quickly to Bethany. Perhaps it was the next day, or the next. On the day following his dramatic entry into Jerusalem, Jesus cleansed the temple courtyard of the money changers who were always found there. And, since this was in the so-called "Court of the Gentiles," it may be that the Gentiles who came to Christ—for they were Greeks in the gentile sense, not Hellenistic Jews—saw his actions. At any rate, some time after Christ's dramatic appearance in the capital certain Greeks came to see this great rabbi from Nazareth.

We are told that the Gentiles came first to Philip, though John does not say why. It may be because Philip had a Greek name: *Philipos*. It meant "a lover of horses." The name may also have reminded them of the great Greek king, Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander. At any rate, they came to Philip; and Philip, who did not know whether Jesus would talk to Gentiles or not, went to Andrew. Incidentally, Andrew also had a Greek name, and both men had come from Bethsaida, a town that was located near a Greek area of the ancient east known as Syrophoenicia. Together Philip and Andrew conveyed the Greeks' request to Jesus.

If we ask why Philip hesitated to bring the Greeks to Jesus immediately, we must remember that from the point of view of the disciples there had been some ambiguity in Christ's actions toward the Gentiles. When he had sent them out on their first preaching mission, he had instructed them, "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt. 10:5-6). He had

told the Syrophoenician woman, "First let the children eat all they want, for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs" (Mark 7:27). He had told the woman of Samaria, "Salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22). On the other hand, Jesus had healed the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman at her request, and apparently he had gone out of his way not only to reach the woman of Samaria but also to preach to her entire town. We recognize that Jesus was not bigoted in his more restrictive statements and actions. He simply felt an obligation to proclaim the coming of his kingdom first to Israel, in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Besides, he knew that the prophecies foretold a turning to the Gentiles after Israel had rejected her Messiah. But Philip and Andrew did not understand this and so must have debated the matter before going to him.

Christ's Hour

I do not know what Andrew and Philip were expecting when they first told Jesus that the Greeks had come to see him. But I am certain they were completely surprised by his answer. They might have expected him to say, "I am not seeing Greeks now." Or, again, "I would be glad to see them." But Jesus voiced neither of these. Instead, he seems to have looked upon the coming of the Greeks as a sign that the climax of his mission had at last arrived; for he said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (v. 23).

This, then, is the first point of Christ's reply. His hour had come. The phrase makes us think of those other instances throughout the Gospel in which we are told that his hour had not yet come. The first was in chapter 2. There Jesus had been confronted by his mother with the implied request that he do something about the lack of wine at a wedding. He replied, "Woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come" (2:4). In other words, though Jesus later provided approximately 120 gallons of the best wine, he was saying that the hour of his crucifixion had not yet come and that he therefore did not want to draw attention to himself by means of a public miracle. In the same way, we read in John 7 that Christ's brothers wanted him to go up to

Jerusalem at the time of one of the feasts in order to do miracles there. They did not believe on him, John tells us. But they had noticed that his followers seemed to be slipping away at this particular time and thought that a few strategically performed miracles might recover the lost momentum. Jesus replied that the brothers could go up to Jerusalem any time they wanted, for their time was always at their own disposal. On the other hand, he said, "The right time for me has not yet come" (7:6, 8). Similarily, on two other occassions when the leaders of the people were seeking to arrest him, John the Evangelist concludes, "But no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come" (7:30; 8:20). All through the three years of his public ministry this had been a dominant theme, but now suddenly it changes. Before, "My hour has not yet come." Now, "The hour has come." And all, so John implies, because of the coming of the unnamed Greeks to Jesus in Jerusalem.

What was the significance of the Greeks? Clearly, they were a sign that the turning point had come, as a result of which salvation would now be offered to Greeks as well as to Jews. Indeed, it would be the beginning of the proclamation of the gospel to the entire world.

John indicates this in his own careful way in telling the story. He does it by contrast and irony.
The contrast is seen in the picture of the Greeks, on the one hand, and in the picture of the
Pharisees given just one verse earlier, on the other. The Pharisees had rejected Jesus. They were Jews, even the most highly regarded of religious figures among the Jews. Yet they had rejected Jesus and were going about to kill him. On the other hand, here were Gentiles, aliens from the house of Israel, seeking him. The irony that I mentioned is also seen in these verses. In verse 19 the Pharisees, who have rejected Jesus, complain, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!" As they say this they are thinking of the great Jewish crowd that had surrounded Christ on Palm Sunday. But they spoke truer than they knew, for this was the point at which literally the entire world, represented by these Greeks, was beginning to go after him.

Christ's Glory

The second point in Christ's response to the question of the Greeks is that now he was to be glorified. "The hour has come," he said. That is, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

There are two senses in which this was true. The first is that it was obviously glorifying to Christ to have the Greeks come to him, indeed, to have all men come to him for salvation. We tend to think in the opposite way, as C. S. Lewis has pointed out in a brilliant little essay called "The Inner Ring." We tend to think that we have arrived when we are exclusive. If we can shut off others in order to preserve what we consider to be a more sophisticated way of life, we think that we are honored and that others will honor us. We notice that it often is hard to get to see and know the so-called "great" of this world. So we try to break into their inner circle, and on the way we exclude others as if to prove to them and to ourselves that we are getting there.

Jesus did not think this way. Rather, his glory consisted in opening the doors wider and wider, so that at the last men and women from every tribe and race would be members of his spiritual family. Indeed, this is almost the last view we have of him. For the same John who gave us this Gospel has also recorded in the Book of Revelation that new song in which those who have been redeemed by Christ praise him, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them a kingdom of priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (5:9-10).

If you wish to see Christ glorified, seek to help others find him. Lead them to Jesus. I am sure that if you do not, Jesus is still honored by your praise of him for saving you. At least I hope you are praising him for that. But what if you also lead others to him? In that case, I am convinced that even your praise will be better; and, besides that, there will then be two or more voices to give him glory.

Christ's Cross

The second sense in which the Son of man was to be glorified is obviously by the cross. Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." But when we ask what that hour was we immediately realize that it was the hour of his death, burial, and resurrection. Consequently, we also recognize that it was by dying for us that he was glorified.

The next verses say this explicitly. "I tell you the truth, Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (vv. 24-25).

I wonder if you have seen this—not so much as it applies to Christians in the living of their own lives, for we shall come to that again in our next study—but as it applies to Jesus. Have you seen that it was only by dying that he could save men and thus draw us to him? What do the verses I have just read mean? They use the image of a grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies. Clearly that is Jesus himself. So the teaching is that unless he died there would be no fruit, that is, no salvation for any poor sinner and that, on the contrary, if he did die, many would be saved.

It is only the crucified Christ dying in the place of sinners who saves. The *example* of Christ does not save. Jesus is not saying to us that if we will only follow his example and try to live as he lived we will find happiness in this life and salvation in the world to come. That is not his message. No man was ever saved by following Christ. Following is involved, of course. After we are saved we are to follow him; he has left us an example for that. But we are not saved by his example. We are saved through faith in what he has done on the cross. After that we can follow him. Moreover, we are not saved by his *teaching.* Jesus did not say that he could point out the way to God and that if men and women would only follow that way, they would find him. That is what teachers of the other world religions have done, but not Jesus. He did not say, "I

will show you the way." He said, "I am the way." Besides, the entire teaching of the Word of God is to the effect that he made the way by dying for us.

Here is Christ's glory, that he died for us; and it is in this above all else that he should be honored. Will you honor him? The best way is by coming to him in faith in order to receive him as your Savior. Or again, if you already know him as your Savior, it is by living as he lived and by bringing others to him.

There is a children's T-shirt that has this inscription: "To know me is to love me." That, as it seems to me, is supremely true of Jesus. To see him as the crucified Savior is to truly know him, and to know him is to love him fervently. God grant that it may be true of many and that those who know him may also glorify him by living their lives in accordance with his Word and in the power of the Spirit.

Chapter 155.
How to Save Your Own Life

John 12:24-26

We live in an age that is conscious of the value of life, at least in some areas. As a result, we have many devices for saving life. We have life preservers, life belts, life rafts, lifeboats, lifelines, life nets, lifeguards, even life insurance, which is a bit of a misnomer since it pays off only at death. And there are also many courses on lifesaving. In all this emphasis upon the saving of life, however, there is probably no instruction as strange as that of the Lord Jesus Christ, who said to the people of his day, "The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (v. 25). We say, "The one who would save his life must save it." Jesus said, "The one who would save his life must lose it, for only by losing it can he save it for the life to come."

Why should we listen to advice that seems so foolish? For two reasons. First, the One who spoke those words did exactly what he said. He gave up his life, yet in such a way that we can hardly regard his having done so as foolish. Second, by giving his life he was extraordinarily successful; he gained both his own life and also a vast host of followers.

This is instruction that cannot easily be put aside. Therefore, we turn to his words with interest. As we study these words we notice that they contain four elements: (1) a great principle, (2) an application of the truth, (3) a personal invitation, and (4) a reassuring promise.

A Great Principle

To begin with, the Lord Jesus Christ enunciated a great principle drawn, as was often his procedure, from nature. He said, "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." We have already seen this principle in John 11:16; we have also seen that it is found throughout Scripture. It is the principle of death and denial, the truth that life comes only by death. Here Jesus illustrated the principle by referring to a grain of wheat, which remains unfruitful so long as it is kept to itself but which becomes fruitful when thrown into the ground and buried there.

We see this in many areas. The man who works only to put in time and receive a paycheck is not worth much to his employer. On the other hand, the man who gives himself to the work, who is seeking above all to do a good job and to get it done, is invaluable. The family provides us with another application. If a father or mother lives only for himself, or herself the family suffers and the children eventually go astray. On the other hand, if they give of themselves, the family thrives and the children become an honor to their parents and multiply the parents' joy.

If this is true in business and family life and in other areas, as it is, then it is particularly true in spiritual things. For only when we say no to ourselves do we become capable of saying yes to God and so receive his fullest blessing. This is what Paul meant when he said, "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). He meant that he had died to self in

order that he might live for God. Or again, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14). In saying this Paul meant that his identification with Christ in death made it possible for him to live for Christ and by Christian values and not for the world and its values.

This is the principle then: death and denial. It is only by death that life comes. We see it in many areas and can hardly miss the fact that Jesus demonstrated the principle by his own death and subsequent resurrection.

The Truth Applied

The difficulty with a principle is that it is so often abstract. Or, to put it in other language, we have difficulty relating it to ourselves. We can relate it to other people, but it does not carry the same weight for us personally. Jesus knew this, of course; so his next words make the application. He had talked about a grain of wheat. Now he says, "The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

The most interesting feature of this verse is that it contains a contrast that is not apparent in the
English translation. We read, "The man who loves (or hates) his life," and he shall keep his "life," and for us there is no way of telling that the words "life" and "life" are different in the original language. Yet this is the heart of what the verse is saying. The first word is *psuche,* which refers to the life of the mind. We call it the ego. It means the human personality that thinks, plans for the future, and charts its course. Jesus is saying that this is what must die. In other words, the independent will of man must die, so that the follower of Christ actively submits his will to him. The other word is *zoe,* which, joined to the adjective "eternal," means the divine life. Every Christian has this eternal or divine life now, but he has it in its fullness only when his entire personality with all its likes and desires is surrendered to Christ. It is close to the same thing

to say that the Christian will experience the fullness of God's blessing only when he consciously and deliberately walks in God's way.

For some reason the idea is current today that, because God is gracious and loving, a Christian can therefore enjoy the fullness of God's blessing without at the same time accepting the full lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ in his or her life. This is not biblical. Those who have convinced themselves of this flout God's laws. They disregard his instructions about the permanency of marriage, for instance. So they get divorces. They ignore his instructions about continuing to meet together with other Christians. So they retreat into their own little private shell of Christianity. They ignore the lost and perishing around them, forgetting that Jesus has sent them as witnesses into the world. They do not live by the highest of moral standards. So they are not happy, and they do not know why. Well, this is why. They have not died to their own desires in order that they might live for Christ. They have not been crucified with him. They have not obeyed him. Jesus is their Savior, but he is not truly their Lord.

If this is true of you, I encourage you to learn this lesson. It is not pleasant to be crucified, I know. But you will never truly live in the full spiritual sense until you are. George Mueller could be your example. He lived in England several generations ago and founded many great orphanages, maintaining them solely through prayer. He was extremely effective. But when asked the secret of his effective service, he replied, "There was a day when I died—died to George Mueller, his opinions, preferences, tastes and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame of my brethren or friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God."

To lose your own life in order to gain it unto life eternal does not mean you must do what Mueller did. But it does mean you must be willing to do *anything* for Christ, if he directs it. It will not be a sad and gloomy thing either. Do not think that. The sad thing is to disobey him. To obey is a joy. Remember that it was "for the joy set before him" that our Lord endured the cross and scorned the shame (Heb. 12:2).

A Personal Invitation

The third element in our Lord's teaching about life through death is an invitation. He has stated the principle and applied it. Now he invites each of us to put it into practice by following him. He says, "Whoever serves me must follow me."

I am sure there is a sense in which any Christian thinks he would like to serve Christ. We read in the Gospels of Jesus going about from place to place without so much as a home to call his own. He slept in the fields. He was weary. At times he was hungry. There were times when he was hounded by his enemies. We read these things and think how we would like to have been there. "For," we say, "if I had been there, I would have taken him in. I would have fed him. I would have seen that he had a place to sleep. I would have shielded him from his enemies." It is possible that we may have done that if we had lived in Christ's time. We may have been like Mary and Martha rather than like the indifferent millions. But I am afraid that whenever we think along these lines much of our thought is mere sentiment. For if we would really serve Christ, that we can do it now. He has even told us how, for he has spoken to all of us at all ages of the church when he said, "Whoever serves me (that is, anyone who really wants to serve me) must follow me."

How can we follow him? Let me suggest some ways. First, you can follow him in the same kind of *self-denial* about which I have been speaking. That is, you can take up your cross and follow him. As I say this, I do not want to suggest that this will necessarily mean a total change in what you are doing with your life. It may be that you are essentially where the Lord wants you. On the other hand, it *may* mean a total change. For none of us is doing all the Lord has for us to do. The real issue, as I have shown, is the issue of the will. Are you willing to do whatever Christ calls you to do? To be poor in his service, if he so leads? To be despised? To be forgotten or nearly forgotten because you are working in some obscure corner of the world? To surrender your leisure time because there is work to be done that you cannot do during your normal workweek and because there is no one else to do it? To surrender a cherished hobby, sin, or pastime? I cannot tell what the

details will be in your case. But God knows them, and you know them. Will you obey him? Will you serve Christ by following him in self-denial?

Second, you can follow him in *service.* You say, "But how can I serve him? He is not here to be served." Really? Did he not say, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40)? And what was he talking about when he said this? He was talking about those who fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, and visited the sick and those in prison.

Do we do those things? There was a time when the evangelical church led the way in such areas. We founded missions and built hospitals. We launched welfare programs and cared for widows and orphans. But I am afraid that we do not do that so much anymore. Rather we have allowed unbelieving churchmen to drive a wedge between evangelism and social service and then push us into only one half. Moreover, we have convinced ourselves that we are fully obeying the Lord by doing it. Do not misunderstand me. We must evangelize. That too is a command of Christ; and if liberal churchmen will not do it, then we have an even greater burden to carry the gospel to all who have not heard it. Moreover, there is much evangelical social work going on. In my city there are evangelical missions, orphanages, homes for the aged, welfare programs. But I am asking whether these works really involve us or whether, on the contrary, we do not simply allow a small minority to do them while we enjoy the comforts of our middle-class life and use our free time selfishly?

Third, you may serve Christ by following him in *holiness.* He lived a perfectly holy life, so holy that even his enemies could find no fault in him. If you would serve him, you must strive to be like him in that. To do that you must put aside all you know to be sin, spend time with him in order to grow in him, and then seek to practice what you already know.

Fourth, you may serve Christ by following him in *faithfulness to his teachings.* Here I speak especially to those who are ministers or

teachers of the Word. Are you faithful to Christ's teaching in your teaching? Or are you seeking to be novel or clever or to gain a reputation for being different from every other teacher? If you are doing the latter, learn that it is not Christ's way. I am aware that our pride wants to serve Christ by striking out in new paths. Spurgeon once wrote, "Proud man has a desire to preach new doctrine, to set up a new Church; to be an original thinker, to judge, and consider, and do anything but obey." But this is no service to Christ. True service consists in faithfulness. It is to tread in the old paths, where he alone leads the way. To follow him in these ways is really to follow him, and to follow is to serve.

Two Incentives

Having given his invitation, the Lord Jesus Christ next offered two incentives to help us respond. They are in the form of promises. First, he promised that he would be with anyone who followed him; second, he promised that God would himself honor such a one. He said, "Where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."

The first half of this phrase, containing the first promise, may be understood in two ways. Probably both ways are intended. On the one hand, it can apply to this life. If we follow Christ here, we can be sure that wherever we are, he will be with us. Indeed, this is self-evident. For if we are with him, then obviously he is also with us. To me this is a great promise. "What is better?"

I ask myself. "To be in the best of circumstances without Jesus? Or to be with Jesus even if being with him means being with him in persecution or suffering?" The only answer I have is: to be with Jesus whatever the circumstances or whatever the cost. He is worth any cost.

The second way Christ's promise that we will be with him may be taken is in reference to the fact that he was going to be with the Father. I know that he said, "Where I am," using the present tense. But this can refer to something in the immediate future and often does. Here it likely

refers to his soon return to heaven. It means that if we are with Jesus here, identifying with him in his suffering and sorrow, we will also be with him in glory. It is the equivalent of Paul's statement (which he says was a faithful or true statement often quoted in the early church), "If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us" (2 Tim. 2:11-12).

This leads to Christ's second promise: "My Father will honor the one who serves me." In one place Spurgeon imagines how this will be. He imagines a case in which a prince and the prince's servant fall into the hands of bandits, who hold the prince for ransom. The negotiations for the ransom are delayed, and during the interval life goes badly for the one who is of noble blood, and, of course, also for the servant. The prince falls sick. The servant tends him. The servant wipes his master's fevered brow and gives him cool water to drink. There is a point in their captivity when the servant, who is well, finds an opportunity to escape; but he declines his opportunity, preferring to remain with his lord. Finally the whereabouts of the prince are discovered, and both the prince and his companion are rescued. "Now," asks Spurgeon, "who is the man whom the King delights to honor?" Clearly it is the servant. "For," says the King, "this is the man who was with my son in the prison, who cared for him, attended him, who nursed him when he was near death. He shall therefore be with my son in his honor, even above that of the greatest statesman of the realm."

In the same way, Jesus tells us that God will honor those who follow him in this life. In this life his way often involves suffering. Sometimes it involves death for his sake. It always involves self-denial. But, says Christ, the suffering will be followed by honor and the self-denial by praise.

Can we not hear it? I think I hear the King's voice. "Stand back, you angels! Make room, you seraphim! Make way! For here comes the man, here comes the woman, who was with my Son. He was only a poor sinful man. He was born in an ungodly time in the midst of an ungodly people. He did not know much. But he was with my Son. He was like

him. He stood by him. Now I will honor him. Come up here. Here, take this crown, and then sit there with my Son on his throne and reign with him. For you shall indeed be with my Son in his glory, even as you were with him in his shame." God grant that this might one day be true for all of us who truly call upon his name.

Chapter 156.
Christ's Soul Troubled

John 12:27-30

None of us understands fully what it cost God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son to forgive our sins. We sometimes pray, in saying the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." But we often do not think of how costly it was to God to make that prayer possible. Nor do others, who are not Christians, appreciate it. Some mock it. On one occasion Voltaire, the famous French agnostic, was asked whether he thought God could forgive some terrible sin, and he replied glibly, "*Pardoner? C'est son metier!*" ("Forgive? That's his job.") Obviously it had not entered his head, nor has it entered the heads of many, how much salvation cost God.

Will we ever know how much salvation cost him? I do not see how, for I do not see how we can ever enter fully into the experience of Jesus as he was separated from his Father during those hours of suffering in which he was made sin for us. Still, that is not all that can be said. For, while we can never result of what the Bible has to tell us. In particular, we can learn from the verses that are before us, which tell us that on the eve of the crucifixion Christ was troubled. "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name" (vv. 27-28).

As we study these verses we also learn an equally valuable and even more personal lesson. For not only do they teach us about Jesus, they

also teach us how we may find comfort when our souls are likewise troubled.

In studying these verses we will look at: (1) the reason why Christ's soul was troubled, (2) the underlying resolve that gave him stability even in the midst of trouble, (3) the divine reassurance in the form of a voice from heaven, and (4) how this may all be applied to ourselves for those times when we also go through testing.

A Cause for Trouble

We look first, then, at the reason why Christ's soul was troubled; and we confess, even before we look for a reason, that the fact itself is startling. If this were a mere man, we would not be surprised. For what man is there who is not sometimes troubled by pressing circumstances or disquieted by fears of what the future may thrust upon him? But this is no mere man. This is the Son of God! This is the Christ! This is the One who stilled the raging waves on Galilee and rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith—"Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:40). This is the One who walked through rampaging crowds led by men intent on his death. This is the same Jesus who in a short while will instruct his disciples, "Do not let your heart be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me" (John 14:1). How can this be? How can the One who turns to us to say, "Let not your heart be troubled," say of himself, "Now is my heart troubled"? It seems incongruous, even inconsistent.

It is not inconsistent when we realize what it was Christ was dreading! We must remember that the coming of the Greeks, recorded just a few verses earlier, had launched a train of thought in Christ's mind that led to musings on his coming crucifixion and on the fact that he would soon bear the sins of the world. He had rejoiced in the coming of the Greeks as an earnest of the many Gentiles soon to come. But their coming presupposed his death—only a crucified Savior could avail for sins—and this meant separation from the Father judicially as he bore the sins

of his people. It was not physical death that he dreaded; it was this spiritual death.

How could the One who had never known one second of unbroken fellowship with his Father, had never sinned, peacefully contemplate that hour in which he should be made sin for us and in which the fellowship that he had would, at least for a time, be broken?

Let me give you a remarkable contrast to make this clear. Consider the death of Socrates as it is described by Plato in the *Phaedo*. Socrates had been condemned to death by the council on grounds of teaching the youth of Athens atheism. While he was awaiting the hemlock potion that he was to drink and that would bring about his death, Socrates discoursed on the immortality of the soul and argued forcefully with his assembled disciples that one should not fear death. Rather he should embrace it peacefully. The body and soul belong to different worlds, he argued. Hence, the destruction of the body cannot affect the soul. It sets it free. As he rehearsed this teaching, Socrates did not merely proclaim his theorems; he lived them. So at last when he drank the hemlock potion and lay down to die, he did so peacefully. Socrates' death is a beautiful, though touching death. Nothing is seen of death's horror. Instead, it is not really a horror, for it merely is that which frees him from the body.

On the other hand, we have Jesus. All the Gospels agree in telling us that as the cross drew near, Jesus began to tremble and be deeply troubled (Mark 14:33). He declared that he had a baptism to be baptized with and was "distressed" until it should be accomplished (Luke 12:50). In Gethsemane he prayed three times that the cup he was about to drink might pass from him. And when at last he concludes, "Yet not as I will, but as you will," this does not mean that at the last he attained to some of the faith of Socrates by coming to regard death as a liberating friend. Rather it means that in spite of his particular death being the greatest of all horrors, he was nevertheless determined to embrace it fully in fulfillment of the plan of God for our salvation.

That is the meaning of the sentence "Now my heart is troubled." We cannot plumb its depths. But when we see the death of Christ in these terms we can at least begin to comprehend it.

An Underlying Resolve

There is another thing to notice about these verses. In spite of the depth of Christ's trouble (which is intensified by linking it to the many verses that speak of his soul's trouble, as I have just done), there is nevertheless an underlying strength or resolve that runs through all Christ is saying. To be sure, Christ's soul is troubled. But there is not even a hint of pulling back or changing course. "What shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'?" The answer is obvious. Of course not! Because, "for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name."

There is something important here. Obviously there is a strong resolve in Christ that sees him through this struggle. But what is the distinct nature of that resolve? Jesus is resolved to die. But why is he resolved to die? We answer, of course, that Jesus is determined to die for our salvation, to save us, and it is true. But notice that Jesus does not give this as his chief reason. To glorify God is his chief end. Thus, although the death he is to die has its horrors, he will not shrink from following whatever way the Father chooses to have the Son glorify him.

God Glorified

Did God glorify himself through Jesus' death? Indeed he did. Moreover, not only was his name glorified, there was even a special voice from heaven to announce that it had already been so and would be so again.

God's name had already been glorified in Christ, for the voice from heaven spoke of the past. Where do we see that past glory? For one thing, in the incarnation. For that, there must be praise to God. The incarnation is the greatest of all mysteries, that the great and holy God of the universe should so take up the cause of his sinful and rebellious creatures that he should become one of them, becoming like them so

that they might become like himself. On the occasion of the incarnation the angels did well to sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Moreover, there are the years of quiet ministry in Nazareth as the One who once ruled angels now learns to do a humble carpenter's work, to know poverty, to be a friend of sinners, to be despised and rejected by those who would have considered themselves important.

Pass on to the cross and beyond that to the first Easter morning, and find there a glory that was yet to come. Jesus had been crucified. To many, the dream seems over. The disciples are scattering. But then the great name of God is glorified again as God breaks the bands of death that bind his Son and sends him forth to empower his weak disciples to the task of world mission. Soon many believe, and in this God is glorified.

Finally, the day will come when Christ will return in glory to judge the living and the dead and to set up his kingdom, and in this God will be glorified. Indeed, in that day the angels who sang at the birth of the Savior will again sing, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and power forever and ever" (Rev. 5:13).

When We Are Troubled

What heights there are in that resolution and prayer, "Father, glorify your name." But now we must step down from the rarefied atmosphere of this third heaven to make this practical in our own earthly environment. It is easy to do. We read that the soul of Christ was troubled. Well, is our soul ever troubled? Is it likely to be troubled in the days ahead? What are we to do in such circumstances? What are we to do when relatives die? When sickness strikes? When we lose our job? When enemies abuse us and friends fail to understand? What shall we do?

We learn from the Master, who when his soul was troubled breathed this prayer, "Father, glorify your name." In other words, if I must lose my health, glorify your name by my sickness. If I must lose my wealth, glorify your name by my poverty. If I must lose my good name, glorify your name by my humiliation. If I must lose my life, glorify your name by my death and send the resurrection.

There is power in that prayer. Look at it a word at a time. The first word is "Father." Anguish is ameliorated, trouble is transformed when we can address God as "Father." We see this in children. A number of years ago when our middle daughter was very small, my wife and I and a group of friends were in Granada, Spain, on a hot afternoon. Earlier we had been up to see the Alhambra, that great monument to Moorish art and culture; but now we were in the bustle of the old city making our way around the great cathedral to a covered market on the other side. There were more adults than children on this particular trip, so there always seemed to be one adult holding each child's hand. Yet suddenly, there we were in the marketplace with the realization that our middle child was missing. Quickly we retraced our steps and at last found her where we had been blocks away. Apparently she had become preoccupied with something and we had gone on, thinking that she was with us. When she noticed that we were gone she had begun to cry, as well she might. For she was lost in a large and frightening city, and there was no one able even to try comforting her in her own language. I got to her first, and at once she came to me, calling out, "Daddy!" She had already stopped crying, and the word "Daddy" was a cry of relief that she had been found.

We may be lost in this world with not a friendly face in sight. We may not know which way to turn. The circumstances may be hopeless. Yet if we will only catch a glimpse of our heavenly Father, though the circumstances remain exactly the same there is a sense in which they will nevertheless be entirely changed, for we will not be lost anymore. And we need not say more. For when we have said, "Father," we have said all that really needs to be said.

The next words are, "Glorify your name." How blessed we will be if we can say those also. "Your name!" The difficulty is that we often substitute *my* for *your* and mean "my name," or at least, "your name and my name together." We want God glorified, but not at our expense or in a way that is not that which we would choose personally.

Ralph L. Keiper illustrates this from his own experience. He was born with very bad eyesight and consequently was greatly handicapped during his years of study for the ministry. He fretted about it and, I suppose, like Paul asked many times that the thorn might be taken away. One day, as he was sitting in the library trying to study, the Holy Spirit began to speak to him. He said, "Keiper, what is the chief end of man?"

Keiper was a student of theology, so he certainly knew the answer to that. He replied, "That's easy. That's the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Man's chief end is to glorify
God and enjoy him forever."

"And is that your chief end?" the Holy Spirit prodded.

"Of course," said Keiper.

At this point, according to Keiper, the Holy Spirit got a bit discourteous. "Which would you rather have," he asked, "perfect eyesight or the privilege of glorifying me?"

This time the young student did not answer so quickly. But at last he said, "There is no comparison. The only possible answer is the privilege of glorifying your name." "Then," said God through the Spirit, "why worry about the means I have chosen to have you glorify it?"

In Me

Finally, if you have followed me and have prayed the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ this far, I wonder if you can also add one more thing, to make it inescapably personal. Add the words "in me" or "in my body." Pray, "Father, glorify your name in me; glorify your name in my body."

I have biblical warrant for asking you to do this; for, in this form, the words are almost the exact words of the apostle Paul as he reflected on the circumstances of his imprisonment in Rome in writing to the Philippians. He wrote of his hope "that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death" (Phil. 1:20).

Think of what had happened to Paul. He had planned a trip to Rome as a free ambassador of the gospel. He had hoped to have been well received and to have been furthered on his way by the prayers and gifts of the Roman Christians. Instead, there had been an abrupt arrest and imprisonment. There had been a two-year confinement in Caesarea. This was followed by perils at sea, a shipwreck, landing on Malta, another journey by sea, and then the long walk to the city of Rome—in chains, in the company of the condemned. Believers had gone out to meet him, as they would have gone out to meet any great celebrity, and for a time Paul had a degree of liberty in his own rented house in Rome. But then circumstances changed. He must have been confined more closely, for in time the Christians even forgot his whereabouts. We know this because when Onesiphorus arrived in Rome to see Paul, no one seemed able to tell him where Paul was, and it was only after considerable searching that this faithful brother found him (2 Tim. 1:16-17). Paul witnessed in prison, and some of the guards began to believe, with the result that the gospel spread into the courts of the emperor. When word of this got back to some of the Christians in the city, they became jealous and soon began to make trouble for Paul. I believe that it was as the result of this trouble that Paul was eventually executed. These were Paul's circumstances. Yet in spite of them Paul rejoices that God will be glorified in him, whether by his life or his death.

That should be our prayer also. If we have difficulty praying it—as we naturally do—we can be helped by the secret of the surrendered life that Paul offers in the next sentence of his Philippian letter. It is: "For me to live is Christ." To live is Christ! Christ! May that be true of us! If it is, then we will be able to endure either joy or sorrow, sickness or health, bane or blessing, to see him glorified.

Chapter 157.
Jesus, the Great Attraction

John 12:31-33

In the whole of human history nothing, no matter how important or how unusual, has attracted men and women like the uplifted Christ. There have been attractions that have seemed to compete for a time. In the ancient world, men and women turned out by the hundreds of thousands to praise the Roman emperors as they returned from their military triumphs. But the emperors passed on, one by one, and at last even Rome itself fell to the advancing barbarians. In more recent times, millions turned out to praise Hitler and followed him to ruin. Now Hitler is gone, and the day that he ushered in lives on only in bad memories.

What attracts men and women today? Is it sports? Certainly millions are caught up in the excitement of a world series or Superbowl playoff. But this year's winner is soon forgotten. And even at the peak of excitement, even on the day of the Superbowl contest itself, not so many can be found watching the playoff (even with the marvel of television) as can be found on the same day, morning and evening, worshiping the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ has attracted more people to Madison Square Garden in New York for more consecutive days and in greater total numbers than any event in New York's history. He has attracted greater crowds for longer periods than any other single personality—in Dallas for Expo 72, in Korea for mass rallies. Christian radio programs have endured for decades where secular programs have succumbed to changing fancies, and Christian churches have remained strong from generation to generation and have even grown both in impact and in numbers.

What is the attraction? It is not the attraction of mere human personalities, for they change. It is not denominational distinctives, for they are all different. It is not slick methods of promotion, for often there is no promotion at all. The attraction is the uplifted Christ. It is the One who said, nearly two thousand years ago in the text that we are now to study, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself. "Jesus promised to draw people to himself, and so he has. Nothing or no one has ever attracted men and women like Jesus.

The Historical Jesus

This remarkable fact deserves some careful consideration. So, taking his promise, let us consider some questions regarding it. First of all, let us ask who is speaking. Who is the "I" of the statement? The answer is Jesus, the Jesus of history.

Notice that it is not an imaginary Christ who draws men and women. Reuben A. Torrey, one of whose greatest sermons was based on the words of this text, has written, "The speaker was our Lord Jesus. He was not the Christ of men's imaginings, but the Christ of reality, the Christ of actual historic fact. Not the Christ of Mary Baker Eddy's maudlin fancy, or of Madam Besant's mystical imaginings, but the Christ of actuality, who lived here among men and was seen, heard and handled by men, and who was soon to die a real death to save real sinners from a real hell to a real heaven."

The situation bears this out, for Christ's words were spoken in the context of the coming of the Greeks to Jesus about which we have been studying. These were real men, who presumably were well acquainted with the religions and philosophies of Greece. But they had come to a real Jesus because they had found mere philosophies inadequate. We must remember that Greece had some of the greatest philosophers the world has ever known. Greece was the native land of Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Epictetus, and many others. But these were not saviors, nor did their philosophies satisfy. So the Greeks came to Jesus, and Jesus saw in their coming the first fruits of those many millions of all tribes and tongues and nations who would eventually flock to him when he

had been crucified as the world's Savior. Let me say it again: It was no myth to whom the Greeks came. It was the flesh-and-blood Jesus, the real Jesus, the Jesus of history. It is this Jesus alone who still draws people today.

Christ Crucified

Our second question is this: In what aspect is this historical Jesus presented? That is, in what guise or stance does he draw people? The answer is found in the phrase "lifted up from the earth" and in the following sentence: "He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die." Clearly Jesus was referring to his crucifixion, and the point of the verse is that it is the crucified Christ alone who draws human beings.

In an earlier study of this theme, in a related verse (8:28), I pointed out that the idea of the uplifted Christ often is taken as an encouragement to lift up Christ in our preaching, with the suggestion that if we will do that, he certainly will draw people. Indeed, Jesus should be lifted up in our preaching, and it is always a shame when any preacher, no matter how conservative or evangelical, allows anything else to take the primary place in his preaching. Jesus should be lifted up in the sense that we must talk about him and seek to present him vividly to the world's gaze. But this is not the primary meaning of this text. The lifting up referred to here is not the lifting up of Christ by preaching but rather the lifting up of the historical Jesus by his enemies in crucifixion. It is the Christ of Calvary who draws. It is the Christ whose blood was shed and whose body was broken. It is the Christ who gave himself in the place of sinners so that he might bear in himself the proper and justified wrath of God.

This is the true reason why the conservative churches are growing and the liberal churches fail.
"Preach any Christ but a crucified Christ," says Torrey, "and you will not draw men for long." They may come for a time for a social gospel, but they will not be there for the duration. They may come for a time for bingo or out of fear, but they will not be hearty and joyous followers

of the Nazarene. Modernism does not draw. Moral rearmament does not draw. Only the crucified Christ draws men and women, for only the crucified Christ reveals the great love of almighty God and provides that Savior whom we need.

Drawn, Not Driven

The third question is this: What does the historical Jesus so presented promise to do? The answer, as already noted many times, is: draw people.

This phrase involves much sound theology. For one thing, it reveals the need of men and women. If they need to be drawn to Jesus, it follows that apart from this gracious and effective drawing all are separated from him. And if they are separated from him, they are separated from everything good and need a Savior. It is not just a small or insignificant separation either. For, as Paul describes it in writing to the Romans, it is a separation that is our ruination. He shows that although the existence and power of God have been revealed to all people, they have nevertheless turned from him to follow their own wisdom and to pursue those vices that originate in their own rebellious hearts. Paul writes, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles" (Rom. 1:21-23). This is a terrible state. So we learn from Romans and from Christ's own statement that men and women are far off from Christ and that he must draw them to him.

There is another point of sound theology in these words. Not only are men and women separated from Christ, they are also separated from him in such a deep and profound way that they will not even come to him unless he draws them. In other words, their very will is captivated by the sin into which they have plunged themselves. Christ is lifted up. But they will not return to him unless he draws them.

Why is it that we must make such an effort to win people and then in addition pray that God will bless our efforts and convert them? It is because they will not come without his intervention. Spurgeon once wrote on this text: "Sometimes, when I am trying to prepare a sermon to preach, I say to myself, 'Why must I take all this trouble?' If men were in their senses, they would run to Christ without calling. Why must we put this business so temptingly? Why must we plead? Why must we be so earnest? Because men do not want to come, not even to their own Savior. They do not wish to have their sins forgiven. They do not wish to be renewed in heart; and they never will come—no, not one mother's son of them—unless He that sent Christ to them shall draw them to Christ. A work of grace in the heart is absolutely necessary before the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus will be accepted by any one of us."

There is a third great lesson in the words "draw him." We discover it when we notice that people are *drawn* to Christ, not *driven* to him. Some think that people must be driven to him. Therefore, they preach on the law and judgment. They seek to frighten people into Christ's kingdom. But this is not Christ's way. Let me say here, lest I be misunderstood, that the law is indeed our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ (Gal. 3:24) and that preaching from the law, as part of the Word of God, is useful in its way. In fact, many men and women *have* been frightened enough of their sin and its consequences to flee to Christ in desperation. But I have noticed—and I believe that anyone will find this to be true who takes the trouble to poll any true Christian congregation — that an overwhelmingly greater percentage of people are won to Christ by the sweet drawing of his love than have ever been won by fear of his disfavor. What does the Word of God say? "I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them" (Hosea 11:4).

Oh, the drawing power of the crucified Christ! How gentle it is! How sweet, how gracious, how quiet, how effective! Men and women are separated from Christ and will not come to him of their own will. Yet he draws them to himself and saves them in spite of themselves to the praise of his glory.

All May Come

There are two more questions that we must ask of Christ's statement. First, who does this historical, crucified Jesus promise to draw? The answer is: everyone. We must understand here that this is not a statement that can be quoted in support of universalism. It is not a promise that every individual who has ever lived will come to Christ and be saved. If it were, it would not be true; for certainly many millions of people go through a lifetime and eventually die without coming to him. It is not a promise that every individual will be won to Jesus, but rather that all types of people—from every level of life and every race and nation—will come to him.

The gospel of the crucified Christ has been preached in palaces and halls of state, and the mighty of this world have come to him. It has been preached in the dirtiest and most dangerous of the back alleys of our cities, and the weak and outcast of this world have come to him. It has been preached to Americans, and Americans have come. It has been preached in the nations of Africa and Asia and South America, and citizens of those nations have come. It has been preached to children, and children have come. It has been preached to the aged, and the aged have come. It has been preached to the intelligent and the not-so-intelligent, to the socially favored and to the socially disadvantaged, to blacks and whites, to Jews and Moslems and Buddhists and total pagans, and men and women from each of these groups have turned to Jesus as the One who is able to cleanse from sin and lead them in the way everlasting.

Will you come? Will you allow the crucified Christ to draw you? It does not matter who you are or what your background is. The text tells us that Christ draws and will draw everyone. Why, then, should not you be among them?

Himself to Himself

The last of our questions is even more obvious than the others. It is this: To whom does Jesus promise to draw such people? The answer is: to

himself. It is not said that Jesus will draw men and women to the visible church, still less to one particular expression of it. It is not said that he will draw them to a particular denomination, sect, movement, or program. It is possible that he may bless these endeavors and even raise up leaders for them, but he does not promise that he will draw men and women to any of these. The promise is only that they will be drawn to Jesus. "Himself to himself!" That is the heart of the text. Is it your desire that those you know might indeed be drawn to him?

This brings me to the point at which I can easily conclude this message. I can conclude it by applying it first to believers and then to unbelievers.

First, to believers involved in serving Christ. If you are serving Christ, you undoubtedly are trying to lead others to him; if you are, then you should learn from this study. Learn, first of all, that if you would win men and women for Jesus, you must draw them rather than drive them to him. Some think that people are won by black looks and scowls, but few come to this kind of preaching or witnessing. Do not scowl at people. Do not seek to condemn them. Love them for Christ's sake, and draw them through his love and by gentle invitations.

Second, learn even as you seek to draw them that, nevertheless, it is Christ who draws and who must therefore be the great and sole attraction. Would you win people? Then do not deal too much with more peripheral matters. Of course, you must cover the whole counsel of God in time in your preaching, if you are a preacher. You must also deal honestly with whatever questions are asked you as a result of your witnessing, regardless in what direction they tend. But to win men and women, it must be the case that Christ, rather than these other matters, is central. And, more than this, it must be Christ crucified. Speak of the Christ who died for sinners, and that very Christ will draw sinners to himself in abundance.

Finally, if you are not yet a Christian, learn that if Jesus said he will draw men and women to himself, then he will draw them now as much as at any point in history. He has not changed. The value of his death

has not changed. People have not changed. The problems have not changed.

The attraction of the Lord Jesus Christ is always present, and he will draw people now. Do you sense that he is drawing you? If so, do not ask, "May I come to Jesus?" Of course you may come, if you are drawn to come. If he is drawing you, come! Resist no longer. Turn from all that might hold you back, and fly to Jesus.

Chapter 158.
Who Is This Son of Man?

John 12:34

The existence of God is not a terribly difficult concept for modern man. In fact, if we are to believe the opinion polls, most of our contemporaries do believe in him. The difficulty most people have is in other areas. Take the idea of God suffering, for instance. For many, the existence of God is probable; but the idea that he became a man in order to die for sinners is an offense so great as to be almost blasphemous. This is not just a problem for men and women of our own day, however. It also was a problem for Christ's contemporaries. No doubt they had all the intellectual difficulties with this idea that we do, but in addition to this, they had a difficulty that arose out of what they knew to be the teaching of the Word of God. In the chapter of John that we have been studying, Jesus had prophesied his death, saying that "the Son of Man [should] be glorified" by it (v. 23). But how could anyone connect the Son of Man with suffering? the people wondered. The Old Testament said, "His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (Dan. 7:14). God had told David, "When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build a

house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever"

(2 Sam. 7:12-13). Isaiah had prophesied of the coming Messiah, saying, "Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing justice and righteousness from that time on and forever" (Isa. 9:7). These and many other texts speak of an eternal and everlasting rule of the Son of Man. So how could the Son of Man suffer? How could he be lifted up? In the Gospel, John reports the people as asking, "We have heard from the Law that Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?" (v. 34).

This is a very important question, of course. And it becomes even more important when we recognize that the tide "Son of Man" was virtually the only title used by Jesus of himself. He has other titles. He is the Lamb of God, the King, the Messiah, the Beloved, the Word, the Son of God, and many others. But Jesus did not use these titles of himself. They were given him by others. In his own speech, he was always the Son of Man. This title occurs sixty-nine times in the synoptic Gospels and twelve times in the Gospel of John.

Moreover, the title "Son of Man" is a particularly inclusive title, as we shall see. One scholar writes, "The idea of the Son of Man ... embraces the total work of Jesus as does almost no other idea." To study the term is, therefore, to study not only what Jesus thought of his own ministry—including why he was to die—but also to gain the broadest possible outlook on it.

A Semitic Idiom

The place to begin in a study of the term "Son of Man" is with the simple meaning of the words, which is quite interesting. Our phrase is a direct translation of the Greek words *huios tou anthropou*, but this phrase is based upon original Aramaic or Hebrew expressions. In Aramaic, the phrase is *bar-nasha*. In Hebrew, it is *ben-ish* or *ben-adam*. The first part of these expressions, *bar* or *ben*, means "son." We have it

in the proper names Barnabas, Barsabbas, Bartholomew, and others. The second part, *nasha*, *ish*, or *adam*, means "man." The Hebrew *ben-adam*, meaning "son of man," is known to many English-speaking people through Leigh Hunt's winsome poem "*Abou ben Adam*," the opening line of which reads, "*Abou ben Adam*, may his tribe increase."

The significance of this linguistic study lies in the fact that in Aramaic and Hebrew idiom (not Greek), the word *bar* or *ben* often is used in a figurative sense, so that, as in the phrases we are considering, the word following it designates the classification to which one belongs. For instance, for "liar" the Aramaic idiom is "son of a lie" or "son of the lie." Sinners are "sons of sin." A wealthy man is a "son of wealth," and so on. Our term, *bar-nasha* or *ben-ish*, therefore denotes one who belongs to the human classification. That is, it simply means "man." In a sense, therefore, the Greek translation of the term, from which we get our title "Son of Man," is too literal and therefore also just a bit misleading. It misleads us when we miss the fact that by using this term Jesus was on the simplest level just calling himself "a man."

This is important, for it speaks to us both of the great humility of Christ and of the joy he found in being made one with his brethren. To be sure, he was much more than man. He was God. He could have called himself "God." But instead of this, we find that the great second person of the Godhead, that is, the Christ who became flesh, rejoices to be precisely what he became—"a man." In a sense, it is his boast. For he knew that in becoming like us, he would open the way for us to become like him.

The Phrase in Daniel

We must not be misled in our study of the phrase by stopping at this point, however. It is true that the words "Son of Man" do mean "man" in Semitic idiom. But it also is true that they had come to mean more in Christ's time as the result of one unique occurrence of this term in the Old Testament and of a subsequent development of the term in the intertestamental period.

The one Old Testament reference is in Daniel, in the seventh chapter. This is the chapter that relates Daniel's vision of the four great beasts that come up out of the sea and reign in succession on earth for a time. It is clear that they represent world powers. The first was like a lion, representing the kingdom of Babylon. The second was like a bear. It represented the kingdom of the Medes and Persians, who conquered Babylon. The third was like a leopard. It represented Greece. Finally, there was a beast too terrible to be compared with any known animal. It represented the coming Roman empire. Within this empire, different kings competed for prominence, and one king, represented by a "little horn," displaced three of the others.

At this point, the vision shifts to heaven, and Daniel describes a scene in which thrones are set up and the Ancient of Days takes his place upon one of the thrones and renders judgment. In this judgment, the last of the beasts is killed and all have their kingdoms taken away. Daniel then writes of the final conquest and of a new and everlasting kingdom: "In my vision at night I looked and there before me was one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations, and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (Dan. 7:13-14).

In the period following the writing of Daniel and before the coming of Christ, this concept of the Son of Man was taken up in various apocryphal writings (such as 4 Ezra and the book of Enoch) and in the Targums. In these books, "Son of Man" is one term given to the anticipated Messiah.

This is a different situation from the purely linguistic meaning of the Hebrew or Aramaic phrases, therefore. Linguistically, the phrases mean man. But in these sources, they obviously mean man in a very specific sense. That is, they mean "The Man," understood as that eternal or

archetypal man who exists eternally with God and who is to appear at the end of time to consummate God's plan of salvation.

One other thing must be said about this Son of Man figure. As we read the apocalyptical writings, we detect that there is not always full agreement as to who the Son of Man is or what he will do. He is a Messianic figure, but a shadowy one. Consequently, there must have been a wide variety of opinions concerning him in Christ's day. Here we probably have a clue as to why Jesus used this term rather than another to describe himself. The other terms—Messiah, Son of God, Deliverer—all had very fixed meanings, and the meanings were not those Jesus wished to have attached to his ministry. To give one example, to most people the word "Messiah" denoted a political figure whose primary work would be the deliverance of Jewish lands from the Romans. Jesus was the Messiah. He acknowledged this indirectly in his conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4:25-26). But if he had said this publicly, everyone would have expected him to organize an army and lead a liberation movement; and he did not want this. So he did not make an open claim to be the Messiah. However, with the Son of Man concept, it was different. People knew that this was a special Messiah-type figure, but they did not know what to think about it precisely. The question of our text indicates this. "Who is this 'Son of Man'?" Therefore, Jesus used this phrase of himself while at the same time infusing it with whatever content he chose to give it. In other words, it became the supreme title by which he described his own person and ministry.

A Suffering Savior

This leads to the question of how Jesus did use the title, which is the important issue. What did he mean by the Son of Man? What ministry did he conceive for this figure? As we look at the references to this figure, primarily in John's Gospel, we discover several major teachings.

1. Jesus used the term "Son of Man" to teach that he was *preexistent.* That is, the life of the Lord Jesus Christ did not begin at birth, as our lives do. Rather, he is eternal, having existed with God the

Father from the beginning, as John declares in the prologue to his Gospel. This is the first clear teaching about the Son of Man in John's Gospel. It occurs in Christ's conversation with Nicodemus. In this conversation Christ said, "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came down from heaven—the Son of Man" (3:13). In other words, no mere man can say what heaven is like, because no man has ever been there. But Jesus can because he came from heaven. His life did not begin on this earth. In chapter 6, there is a similar but indirect reference to the same truth. In that chapter, Jesus asks of those who were offended by his teaching, "What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!" (v. 62). In other words, "What if I should not go to the cross but rather just return to heaven?" In these verses the preexistence of the Son of Man is self-evident teaching.

2. The unique element in Jesus' teaching about the Son of Man is that the Son of Man was to suffer *humiliation and death.* So we naturally find more verses devoted to this teaching than to any other. For example, in the verse immediately following the one in which Jesus taught Nicodemus about his preexistence, the Master disclosed, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (3:14-15). Clearly, even at this point in his ministry, Jesus had his crucifixion in view.

There is another reference to his suffering in chapter 8. "So Jesus said, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me'" (v. 28). In chapter 12, in the verse that begins the section we are studying, the same truth is suggested, "Jesus answered, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified'" (v. 23). Again, in chapter 13, "When he [Judas] was gone, Jesus said, 'Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him'" (v. 31).

None of Christ's hearers would have thought that suffering was a part of the Son of Man's ministry. Thus, when Jesus spoke of suffering, they were always puzzled. They looked for glory and power when the Son of

Man should come. Jesus taught that glory was to come by suffering, and power by way of the cross.

3. The third point to Christ's teaching about the Son of Man is that he was to become a vital *part of all who should believe* on him. That is, the salvation that he would bring was to be not merely objective or abstract but personal. It was to be applied individually. On this point, the teaching in John 6 is quite clear. "Do not work for the food that spoils but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval" (v. 27). "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (vv. 53-54). We have already seen that eating Christ's flesh and drinking Christ's blood is the equivalent of "coming" to Christ or "believing" on him.

4. At several points Jesus refers to the Son of Man in the context of the *final judgment.* This is the fourth doctrine, and it is this that comes closest to the original teaching concerning the Son of Man in Daniel. In John's Gospel, Jesus is reported as saying, "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted to the Son to have life in himself. And has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man" (5:26-27). In Revelation 14 there is a more elaborate description of this judgment; there the Son of Man appears with a sharp sickle in his hand, and both he and an angel "gathered its [the earth's] grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath" (Rev. 14:19).

5. Mention of the Book of Revelation leads to a fifth teaching concerning the Son of Man that, although it is not mentioned by Jesus in the Gospels, nevertheless is important. This teaching comes from a vision of Christ that John had on Patmos, which is recorded in the first chapter of Revelation. Here Jesus is seen, not as a separate figure coming to the Ancient of Days to sit with him on one of two thrones (as in Daniel) but as the Ancient of Days himself. John writes, "I turned around to see the voice that was

> speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone 'like a Son of Man,' dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire" (Rev. 1:12-14). The importance of this vision is twofold: first, it identifies Jesus with God the Father, and second, it regards him as being active on earth in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.

What are the lampstands? A few verses later we are told that the lampstands are "the seven churches" (v. 20). Thus, the picture is of Christ's current *rule over the churches.* Indeed, in the next two chapters, Christ addresses the churches, warning of judgment on some and encouraging those who are still faithful to remain so.

Savior and Lord

We need to apply these truths to ourselves, in spite of the fact that much of what I have said seems to be purely academic. How shall we do this? The best way is by catching a vision of the Son of Man and thereby realizing precisely who it is we worship. When we preach Christ or when we gather as God's people to worship Christ, we are not thinking merely of a figure who lived on earth two thousand years ago. True, he did live on earth; it is because of this that we know him. But more than this, we are thinking of the great and eternal God of the universe, the second Person of the Trinity, the one who existed before all things and through whom all that we know came into existence, the one who will also be there at the end to render judgment. This is a glorious Christ. This is one who rightly demands our worship and deserves our service.

If you are not a Christian, you need to come to him first as Savior. You need to thank him for coming and dying for you, and then trust him and follow him. You will not make a wiser decision in your entire remaining life, no matter what that may hold. On the other hand, if you are a Christian already, you must give him an opportunity to be all he desires

to be to you, in order that he who is your Savior might also be your Lord.

Chapter 159.
An Appeal and a Promise

John 12:35-36

There is something especially poignant about a great man's last public teaching or last words. I remember, for instance, how moved I was as a boy when I memorized General Douglas MacArthur's farewell address to the American Congress after he had been relieved as commander of the armed services. I had memorized this speech for a declamation contest and was personally affected as I got to the closing lines. MacArthur referred to the old military ballad, "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away," then concluded, "And like the old soldier of that ballad I now fade away, a soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the light to see that duty. Good-bye." I suppose there was something equally poignant about Napoleon's farewell to his troops from the steps of the hunting retreat at Fountainbleu before his deportation to Elba, and of the last speeches of many other great men.

We come now to the last words of the public teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, uttered just a few days before his crucifixion. These words were followed by many words of private instruction, of course. Undoubtedly, there were wonderful conversations between Jesus and the disciples at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus at Bethany. John himself records the last discourses of Jesus with the Twelve in those final days in and around Jerusalem and in the upper room. But these last were all private words, spoken only to his own disciples. The words we are to study now were his last public teaching.

At this point the sun of righteousness had all but set. Within two or three days, God would blot out the sun on Calvary. Yet, there was still time to turn to the light. So Jesus, who was always love toward those

who were perishing, speaks these last words of solemn appeal and promise. Alexander Maclaren, who provides an excellent sermon on this text, writes, "He loves too well not to warn, but He will not leave the bitterness of threatening as a last savour on the palate; and so the lips, into which grace is poured, bade farewell to His enemies with the promise and the hope that even they may become 'the sons of light.'"

Jesus said, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light."

We notice as we read these words that they are not a direct answer to the question that Jesus had been asked in the verse preceding. He had said that he was going to be lifted up from the earth in death, and the people had asked how this could be true of the Messiah. "We have heard from the Law that Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?" (v. 34). This was their question, but Jesus did not answer it. Instead, he dealt with a different theme entirely. The people wanted to discuss expectations of the Messiah. Today it would be prophecy. Jesus, on the other hand, wanted to talk about the relationship of an individual to himself. "The darkness is coming," he said. "So seize the light while you have it." The same words apply to our time in which the darkness is even more evident and the light often shines but faintly.

What is our analysis of these verses? From my viewpoint, they provide a perfect last will and testimony. They have four parts: (1) a reminder, (2) a challenge, (3) a warning, and (4) a promise. That is the message I would also leave with you in this study.

Christ's Reminder

The reminder is a reminder of a simple truth: namely, that Jesus Christ is this world's light. This is marked in the Greek text, because in four of the five occurrences of the word "light" in these verses, "light" is preceded by the definite article—"*the* light." It is a clear reference to

Christ. "You are going to have *the* light a little while longer. Walk while you have *the* light... put your trust in the light." This is all the more obvious in that in the last occurrence of the word, in reference to men and women rather than to Jesus, the article is omitted. There we read merely of being "sons of light."

This is significant, because it is a teaching found throughout the Gospel and is almost the first descriptive epithet used by John of Jesus. The first descriptive term is "word" or *logos*. It occurs in verse 1. The second is "life." But then, as early as the fourth verse of the Gospel, the term "light" occurs, and this is immediately picked up and repeated so often that it occurs six times just in the next six verses. "In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness of that light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world" (1:4-9). Later Jesus will himself say, "I am the light of the world" (8:12; 9:5). John writes elsewhere in his Gospel, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes to the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God" (3:19-21). The last occurrence of the image is in John 12:46, in which Jesus cries out, "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."

This is a profoundly rich image, of course, which is why Jesus reverts to it here on the eve of his crucifixion. For one thing, it identifies him with God the Father, which means that he is also preexistent and eternal. Light is an ancient image of God. David writes in one psalm, "The LORD is my light and my salvation" (Ps. 27:1). Again he says, "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light shall we see light" (Ps. 36:9). In mathematics, there is an axiom to the effect that "things equal

to the same thing are equal to each other." Consequently, if Jesus is light and if God is light, Jesus must be the same as God. He is God. This is certainly the biblical teaching.

Second, the image teaches that Jesus makes God known. Light is as universal an image for the illumination of the mind as it is an image of God. Without illumination, men are in mental and spiritual darkness. They do not know God. Jesus comes; his light shines upon men. Now those who were in darkness have the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Third, Jesus is unalterably opposed to the darkness. That is, he is opposed to ignorance, sin, and evil, and is determined to destroy them. How does he do this? In the simplest terms, he does it simply by shining. The cross is the focal point of his victory, of course. But in terms of the response of the individual, he overcomes ignorance and evil simply by shining into our hearts and by thus drawing us to him. This is so natural a part of the illumination he gives that John can argue in his first epistle that if we are not drawn away from sin into righteousness, we are not truly Christians (1 John 1:5-7).

Fourth, this image reveals Jesus as a full or genuine light, as opposed to all partial lights. It is what John means when he calls him "the true light" that has come into the world (John 1:9). To call Jesus the light is not to deny that there are other lights, however derivational, misleading, or imperfect. Man is made in the image of God; and, in spite of the fall, some vestiges of that image remain. He aspires to good things. He desires peace, progress, prosperity. None of these things is bad. It is just that they are partial lights. They are good so far as they go, but they do not go far enough. They deal with externals, but they do not provide that inner satisfaction that all men need and so desperately crave. To call Jesus the true light is, therefore, to refer to him as that sole source of full illumination by which men and women can learn the truth about God and about themselves and enter into that close personal relationship to him to which they are called. All this is involved in Christ's reminder that he is the light.

Suppose the people reject him? It does not matter. He is still the light. Suppose they kill him? He is still the light. He is the light for our own time also.

A Challenge

Jesus did not only give the people a reminder, however; he also gave them a challenge that was coupled to it. It has two parts: "walk" in the light (v. 35), and "believe" in the light (v. 36). Here Jesus speaks of walking first and of believing second. Placed in logical order, "believe" should come first and "walk" second. First, we must believe on the light. After that we are to walk in it.

What does it mean to believe on the light? Simply, it means to believe on Jesus, which is to trust him. In the twentieth chapter, John gives this as the purpose of the book: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (vv. 30-31). In the biblical sense, believing on someone means to take that individual at his or her word and then to act upon it. In the case of Jesus, it means to take him at his word when he declares himself to be the Son of God and our Savior and then to act upon that conviction by trusting him as Savior and following him as Lord.

Is Jesus God? Then he must be our God and we must worship him as God. Is he the Savior? Then he must be our Savior. Is he the One who lives to instruct and help and strengthen his people? Then he must be our instructor and helper, and the source of our strength.

This leads to the second part of Christ's challenge. It is the challenge to "walk" in Christ's light. This is a step beyond merely believing, though it is related to it. It involves continuing activity or progression. In other words, a proper response to Jesus involves much more than merely committing oneself to a set of truths and acting upon them once. Rather, it involves committing oneself to Jesus, who is on the move, and following him continuously. It means walking in his steps. It means

doing what he does, thinking as he thinks, acting as he acts. To do that is to walk in the light, for he is the light. To refuse to follow him is to fall back into darkness.

The Encroaching Darkness

The third part of Christ's final teaching is a warning: "Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you." This is serious, for it is the teaching that if we do not follow Christ, not only do we remain in darkness, but the darkness in which we find ourselves intensifies. Maclaren has written, "Rejected light is the parent of the densest darkness, and the man who, having the light, does not trust it, piles around himself thick clouds of obscurity and gloom, far more doleful and impenetrable than the twilight that glimmers round the men who have never known the daylight of revelation."

The Pharisees in John's story of the man who had been born blind are the clearest example of this principle. On the one hand, the story of the man who had been blind is the story of Christ bringing light to one who had been born in darkness. This was true both physically and spiritually. The physical miracle is obvious. The spiritual miracle is seen in the blind man's gradual growth in perception as to who Christ was and in believing on him. At the beginning of the story, he knows him only as "the man they called Jesus" (9:11). Later on, he calls him "a prophet" (v. 17). Still later, Jesus is referred to as being "from God" (v. 33). The last we see of

the man who had been born blind, he is calling Christ "Lord" and worshiping him as "the Son of Man" (vv. 35, 38). In other words, the story of the man born blind is the story of the coming of spiritual (as well as physical) light to a man who had been born in both spiritual and physical darkness. On the other hand, the story is also the story of a progression into greater darkness by those who would not have Christ's light. The Pharisees could see physically, but they would not see spiritually. Consequently, they come to hate the light increasingly as the story unfolds.

What will it be like in our lives? Will we go from faith to faith and from sight to sight, as was the case in the life of the man who had been born blind? Or will we go from unbelief to unbelief, from darkness to darkness? It all depends upon our relationship to him who is the only genuine light of this world.

A Promise

Finally, we notice that Christ's words also contain a promise. It is the promise that, if we believe in the light, we will be "sons of light." How gracious this is! We notice that, in one sense at least,
Christ's final sermon is complete even without this promise. It has contained a reminder of Christ's teaching. It has presented a challenge. It has even possessed a warning of what will happen if the challenge goes unheeded. If Jesus had stopped at that point, who could say that anything is lacking? No one! Yet such is the grace of our Lord, that he seems unwilling to end his public words with a warning and instead closes on a note of promise. True, the darkness is coming. But though it comes, the one who believes on Jesus may, by that very belief, become a child of light and thus reflect the radiance of his departed Master to the darkening world.

This does not mean that the followers of Christ will be lights in the same sense that he is the light. There is only one true light; that is Jesus. But it does mean that they may reflect him and thus become a source of blessed illumination to others.

This, then, is Christ's final message. For some it must be a reminder. If you have heard the truth but have not responded to it, you must be reminded. You must also believe. Others require a challenge. If you are one who needs a challenge, you may remember what Jesus has said and know that you must do something. But you have not done it. Heed the challenge. Jesus commands you to "put your trust in the light" and "walk in it." Still others must be warned. You need to be warned if you have delayed your decision. Learn that you are in danger of slipping away into darkness forever. Learn that there is a true light and a true

darkness, and believe on Jesus. Finally, there are those who must be encouraged by Christ's promise.

"Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." Believe on him, and enter into that great and promised blessing.

Chapter 160.
The Miracle of Unbelief

John 12:36-40

Jesus' last sermon to the people of his day—a sermon that contained a reminder of his teaching, a challenge to respond to him, a warning to those who would not respond, and a promise to those who would—properly closes this, the middle section of John's Gospel. It is a section in which Jesus began to call a people to himself out of Judaism. It started with Christ's call to the man who had been born blind; it ends with this final and open invitation: "Believe in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light" (v. 36). The next section of the Gospel, chapters 13 through 17, properly contains Christ's private teaching to those who are his own. Therefore, there are no more public invitations to come to him. In spite of this good ending, however, John seems unwilling to conclude this section of the Gospel without a few summarizing comments. Therefore, in verses 37-50, we find a three-part conclusion. First, there is an analysis of the stark fact of Israel's unbelief (vv. 36-41). Second, there is the acknowledgement that, nevertheless, some did believe, coupled to an explanation of why they did not come forward publicly to defend the Lord (vv. 42-43). Third, there is a resume of the whole of Christ's teachings, stressing (1) his relationship to the Father, (2) his identity as this world's light, (3) the danger of unbelief, and (4) the nature of his teachings and the blessed result of responding to them (vv. 44-50).

This threefold summary of Christ's public ministry will occupy us in this and the last two studies of the twelfth chapter. The next study, "What Isaiah Saw," is an excursus.

Unbelievable Unbelief

Jewish unbelief has been a recurring theme throughout this Gospel. So we are not surprised to find that, as John brings his account of the public ministry to a close, he reminds us of this once more. He writes, "When he had finished speaking, Jesus hid himself from them. Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him" (vv. 36-37). It is a striking fact, but a true one, that Israel would not receive, and actually killed God's Messiah.

The unbelievableness of Israel's unbelief escapes us today, being separated from the events of those days by nearly two thousand years. But though it means little to us, the strangeness of Israel's unbelief did not escape the early preachers of the gospel, most of whom were Jews, and in fact actually became a source of great puzzlement and anguish for them. These men lived their lives in the light of the Old Testament prophecies and therefore knew that the Messiah of God was to come to bless Israel. Besides, they knew that Jesus was this Messiah. What should have happened? Obviously, Israel should have believed in Jesus and have welcomed him joyfully. But instead of this, Israel seemed as a whole to be rejecting him while the Gentiles seemed to be increasingly responding. How could this be? Did it mean that God had changed his mind, that he had cast off his people? Did it mean that events had taken even God by surprise? The importance of these questions and the struggles that they reflect are seen clearly in Romans 9-11, in which Paul fights his way through such questions forcefully, concluding at the end that God has not cast off his people but rather has allowed them to fall into unbelief for a time in order that his grace in Christ might be extended to the Gentiles as well as to a remnant chosen out of Israel.

This is precisely the problem with which John is dealing. And while it is true that he does not deal with it as analytically as does Paul, nor as fully, nevertheless it is along the same lines

(particularly in regard to prophecy) that he answers it. This answer is in the verses before us.

John asks why it is that the nation of Israel as a whole did not believe. The answer he gives is that the unbelief of the Jews is in accord with prophecy. "Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: 'Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?'" (vv. 37-38).

It is a terribly significant prophecy that John refers to, of course. For the verses he quotes are those that open the magnificent fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. The chapter begins with the questions: "Who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?" The answer is: No one. So the chapter goes on to show the consequences of the failure to believe. The Messiah came, but he was "despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with grief. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isa. 53:3). This is the more remarkable in that the Messiah was to speak such great words and perform such great deeds. Here Bishop Westcott, one of the most careful commentators on John's Gospel, notes: "The prophecy itself (Isa. 53:1) sets forth the two sides of the divine testimony, the message as to the servant of God which appealed to the inward perception of truth; and the signs of the power of God which appealed outwardly to those who looked upon them. In both aspects the testimony failed to find acceptance. The message was not believed; the signs were not interpreted." John also indicates that Jesus spoke wisely ("These things spoke Jesus," v. 36) and acted powerfully ("He had done so many miracles," v. 37); yet the people of his time did not respond to him.

John's quotation cannot be construed in any way that would lessen the responsibility of men and women for their own disobedience. It is true that by their disobedience the people of Christ's day fulfilled Scripture (v. 38). It is also true, as the next verses will also show, that as a result of their disobedience God increasingly blinded their eyes so that they could not see, or understand, or be converted (vv. 39-40). But this does

not mean that they were not responsible before God for their lack of response to Jesus. John does not minimize human responsibility. Consequently, the tone of the passage is actually one of marveling that the people of Christ's day could have disbelieved, particularly after he had taught so persuasively and done so many miracles.

In view of this emphasis it may be well to translate verse 38 by using the second of two possible meanings of the Greek word lying behind the word "that." The word can mean "in order that," which would tend to put the blame for their unbelief upon God. But it can also mean "so that" or "consequently." If that is so, the verses may be translated, "They believed not; consequently the saying of Isaiah was fulfilled." John's point is not that God made them disbelieve, but rather that we should not be surprised by their disbelief in that God had prophesied it even before it happened.

Anyone who is away from God is away from God because of his or her own desires and decisions. Men and women departed from God in Adam, and they remain cut off from God because they prefer their own will to God's will and will not have Christ to be their Savior.

When God Hardens Hearts

"But what of the next verses that quote Isaiah 6:9-10?" someone might ask. "Do they not say explicitly that God blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts precisely so that those involved might not see, understand, or turn to Jesus?" It is a good question. Let me answer it.

Above everything else, we must say that if God chooses to intervene in a specific way in an individual life to harden that life so that the individual cannot believe on Jesus, then God is right in so acting. If this is what he actually does—and notice that I only said "if—then God is just, and no man (least of all we ourselves) has the slightest ground for rebuking him. As Paul writes, "What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ...Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Rom. 9:14-18). If God hardens hearts as a result of which men and women cannot believe

and are judged for it, then that is just the way it is, and God is guiltless. We are in no position to judge him by our limited wisdom and inadequate standards.

But is this, in fact, what he does? Or, to be more specific, is this what our text teaches? I do not believe so, for these reasons:

First, this is not what the Word of God as a whole teaches. What does it teach? Does it teach that men are able to choose God but that God singles out some, whose minds he closes, who therefore do not believe, and who are therefore damned? Is it this? Or is it that men begin by being unable to choose God, God intervenes graciously to open some eyes to see the truth and embrace it, and, as a result, these objects of God's gracious intervention are saved? Certainly it is the latter. Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44), and he pointed out that God does draw some (John 6:37). Consequently, in terms of salvation it is hardly necessary for God to blind anyone; for men begin blind and come to Christ only when God intervenes to give sight to them. If God wishes anyone to go to hell, he needs only to withhold his grace, and the individual will go there as the inevitable consequence of his or her own negative capabilities.

The second reason why this is not the proper interpretation of our text is that an entirely different sequence is indicated even in this passage. We notice here that John does not begin with a quotation from Isaiah 6:9-10. He begins with the statement that even though Jesus did so many miracles, "they still would not believe in him." That is, he begins with their unbelief. It is only after this that he notes that God hardened their hearts lest they should see and be converted. In other words, this is a judicial activity. In the beginning they "would not" believe. Afterwards they "could not."

The third reason why we must not reason from God's blinding of eyes to unbelief (but rather the reverse) is that it is the latter that occurs in the immediately preceding words of Jesus. In that passage Jesus warned his listeners not to reject the light, arguing that if they rejected the light, an even greater darkness than they now knew would come upon them. This

is not a darkness that causes unbelief but rather a darkness that results from it. It is a working out of God's just laws, by which faith leads to even greater faith and unbelief to even greater unbelief. We think here of Paul's threefold repetition of the phrase "God gave them over" in the first chapter of Romans. "If God withhold abused grace, and give men over to indulged lusts, if he permit the evil spirit to do his work on those that resisted the good Spirit, and if in his providence he lay stumbling-blocks in the way of sinners, which confirm their prejudices, then he *blinds their eyes,* and *hardens their hearts,* and these are spiritual judgments, like the giving up of idolatrous Gentiles to *vile affections,* and degenerate Christians to *strong delusions*."

In all this there is a most solemn affirmation of human responsibility and an even more solemn warning of what transpires when the light of God goes unheeded. Because of her unbelief God gave Israel up to a deep darkness. Because of unbelief God has also promised to give the gentile world up to a "powerful delusion, so that they will believe the lie" (2 Thess. 2:11). Could that be true of you? If so, be warned by this teaching, and do not trifle with the overtures of God's love for you or his great grace.

Having said all this, one problem remains. We have concluded that God does not specifically keep some men and women from believing on Jesus but rather elects some to salvation as an outflowing of his mercy. God's hardening of hearts is a judicial hardening of those who have already turned from the light to walk in darkness. But why, we might ask, does he not save everyone? Why does he not intervene to save all men before they persist in unbelief and enter into an even greater darkness?

In the most profound sense, we must say to these questions that we just do not know. "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" (Rom. 11:34). This is perhaps the greatest of all mysteries; and if our understanding here is not perfect, it is only what might be expected. We must simply confess our limited understanding.

On the other hand, while we do not understand the matter perfectly, there are at least in this particular case some suggestions by which we may discern a little of God's purposes. To begin with, the first passage quoted from Isaiah is from that chapter in which the death of the Lord Jesus is fully prophesied. Isaiah shows that he was to be rejected by his people and therefore to be crucified. Moreover, he shows that as a result of this undeserved death the Messiah was to be the Savior of a great number of people. How could Jesus have died as he did unless the nation of Israel had rejected him? We might surmise that it could have happened in some other way. But it is hard to see how Jesus could have died unless he had been rejected. In this case, then, the blinding of Israel becomes the means by which the light of God shines forth from the cross unto salvation.

Moreover, it is also true that it was by the blinding of Israel that the gospel extended to the gentile nations (cf. Rom. 11:25). Had the Jews accepted the gospel it is hard to see how it could have gone out freely to the Gentiles. "But when the Jews rejected it, it became a world religion," as Morris notes. It may be that this is suggested by John's second quotation from Isaiah; for it occurs in a context in which it is said that the whole earth (not just the land of Israel) is filled with Christ's glory.

True Conversion

These are difficult words both because they speak of God's sovereign purpose in the affairs of men and because they speak of our responsibility. The sovereignty of God? That is something over which we have no control, and of which we possess only limited understanding. On the other hand, responsibility is something which must concern each of us personally.

Have you responded to the light you have been given? If not, let me remind you from the Isaiah quotation what should happen. The quotation contains four steps for a true conversion. First, you must *see* with your eyes. That is, you must perceive the reality of divine things and have some knowledge of them. I am well aware that this is

impossible except by the grace of God. But perhaps God is thus graciously working in you and you have progressed thus far. If so, it is good. You must begin by such perception. Second, you must *understand* with your heart. This means that you must not only hear the truth and understand it objectively; you must also understand it and receive it personally. Third, you must be *converted.* This means that you must turn from sin to Christ, for conversion is nothing more than such an about-face or turning. It means leaving everything that might exert a contrary claim upon you in order truly to have and follow Jesus. Finally, you must *be healed* by God. This is God's final seal upon conversion and is itself salvation. God's healing involves justification, sanctification, and glorification for which God alone is responsible.

In the first quotation Isaiah asked, "Who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" May God give you grace to answer, "I have believed it; I do believe it." To so believe and so answer is to become a son or daughter of light and a recipient of God's healing.

Chapter 161.
What Isaiah Saw

John 12:41

The Gospel of John is a book filled with many extraordinary verses. But none is more extraordinary than (and few are equal to) the verse to which we come now. It is a verse in which John refers to one of the most glorious visions of God ever given to a human being—the vision received by Isaiah at the beginning of his ministry as a prophet, in which he saw Jehovah sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, with his train filling the temple—saying quite naturally, it would seem, that this applies to Jesus. John says, "Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him" (v. 41).

To us the reference may seem natural, for we are conditioned by centuries of Christian theology, in which full divinity has been ascribed to Jesus of Nazareth by many persons. But it was hardly natural to John, who was a Jew. Nor was it natural to his contemporaries. We must remember that for the Jew of Christ's time God had become something almost inaccessible and incomprehensible. God was the Holy One of Israel, and rightly so. He dwelt in glory unapproachable. None actually saw him. When on occasion some extraordinary figure like Moses or Isaiah received a vision of God in his glory, this was not believed even then to be a viewing of God as he is in himself but only what we might call an image of him. And even this was extraordinary and filled with wonder. Moreover, of this limited number of visions, none was more glorious than that received by Isaiah, so that if one wanted to describe what God was like in himself, nothing could come closer than this vision. Yet it is precisely this vision with all its breathtaking splendor that John blithely applies to Jesus. Without questioning, it would seem, John takes this, the most exalted portrait of Jehovah in the entire Old Testament, and says that it is a portrait of the humble carpenter from Nazareth, who was about to be crucified as a result of the hatred of his people and the indifference and calculating political expediency of the local Roman government—so great is his opinion of Jesus.

This is not the only time that Jesus has been called God, of course. He is said to be God in the opening verses of John: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (1:1). The same truth is implied by Jesus himself in John 8: "Before Abraham was born, I am" (v. 58). It is at least not denied toward the end of the book: "Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God'" (20:28). But nothing quite equals this amazing utterance, for it is so graphic, so dynamic, and so unexpected.

To understand this we need to ask precisely what it was that Isaiah saw when "he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him." And we need to ask what it teaches about the Lord Jesus.

Four Elements

Here is Isaiah's full record of the vision: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook, and the temple was filled with smoke" (Isa. 6:1-4). The vision contains four elements. First, there is the vision of the Lord himself, high and lifted up. This speaks of God's sovereignty in the universe. Second, there is the view of his train filling the temple. This has to do with the fact that at this highest point of the universe there is room for no one else. Third, there is a picture of those angelic beings who wait upon God to do his bidding. This speaks of service and of how it should be performed. Finally, there is a demonstration of worship, which teaches us how we should worship the Lord Jesus Christ, who is our great God.

A Sovereign God

The first element, then, is the element of sovereignty, embodied in the picture of "the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted." It is a dramatization of the fact that he and he alone is in control of things and is always in control of them.

The obvious contrast with Uzziah is important, for it was in the year King Uzziah died that Isaiah received his vision. Uzziah was a good king who had enjoyed a long rule—in all, fifty-two years—during which time the kingdom was restored to a measure of that righteousness and prosperity it had enjoyed under David and Solomon and their immediate successors. Isaiah had grown up under the latter years of the rule of this great king. Unfortunately, however, Uzziah became ill with leprosy and eventually died. His successor was a young man of only twenty-five years of age. Besides this, trouble was brewing in the form of an increasingly belligerent and powerful Syria to the north. In time this kingdom overran the northern kingdom of Israel and threatened

Judah. In the year that Uzziah died, Isaiah undoubtedly bewailed the king's loss and despaired over what the future might bring. But it was precisely at this time that God revealed himself to Isaiah as the One who was still on the throne. Uzziah might be dead, but Jehovah was living. Uzziah might have yielded up his throne, but Jehovah reigned. God, not man, was in control. Consequently, Isaiah need not fear but instead could trust God in spite of circumstances.

And, indeed, he did! In fact, trust in the sovereign God lies at the base of all Isaiah's subsequent preaching and is the secret of his great strength. Jeremiah faced many hard tasks. He knew the greatness of Israel's God, as Isaiah did. Yet Jeremiah complained and drew back and sometimes doubted. Isaiah never complained; nor did he doubt. Isaiah had peace even in storm, and the secret of it was his assurance of the sovereignty of God as revealed in this vision.

I wonder if you know God to be a sovereign God to you? Not abstractly but in a personal way? If not, it is a pity; for this is the most important of all the doctrines that concern our God.

In one of his minor writings, Donald Grey Barnhouse, the founder of the *Bible Study Hour,* tells a story from his childhood that illustrates the proper place of this doctrine in any system of theology. It concerns a visit to his home by a member of the U.S. Cavalry. In those days there were very few automobiles and no airplanes; so the army still used horses, and the cavalry was an important and glamorous branch of the armed services. This cavalryman gave the young Barnhouse a troop flag that read "Troop M, 14th Cavalry." One day in boasting about the relative importance of this branch of the service, the soldier said, "The most important thing in the armed forces is a Cavalry General. After that there is a Cavalry Colonel, a Cavalry Major, a Cavalry Captain, a Cavalry Lieutenant, a Cavalry Sergeant, and a Cavalry Trooper. And then there is the
Cavalry Trooper's horse, followed by nothing, followed by nothing, followed by a General in the
Infantry."

Everyone laughed. But years later Barnhouse remembered it and applied it to the relative importance of the various doctrines in Christianity. What is the most important doctrine in Christianity? The most important doctrine is the sovereignty of God. Our God is the Lord, high and lifted up. Beside him there is no other God. We might say that after that there is no second doctrine. He is the Lord. Nothing is second to that. So after it there is nothing, followed by nothing. Then come the doctrines that concern God's attributes, the person and work of Jesus Christ, justification, sanctification, and so on. Then there are more blank spaces. Finally there come doctrines about which the churches are divided. How should the churches be governed? Should there be bishops? What forms should the ordinances take? Is the Lord's Supper a mere memorial or does it contain a real presence of the Lord? And so on. The tragedy of most Christian discussion is that it centers almost exclusively on the third of these categories, rarely considers the second of these categories, and almost never even appreciates the first category. Isaiah began with category number one, and it transformed his ministry. So would it transform us all, if we would only see it and believe it wholeheartedly.

No Other Gods before Me

The second thing that Isaiah saw was God's train (or robe), and he noticed that it filled the entire temple. This suggests that there is room for no one else at the highest pinnacle of the universe. It is not just that Jehovah reigns, therefore, but also that no one else reigns beside him or in opposition to him. It is not just that the Lord Jesus Christ is Lord; it is also that no one else is Lord. A little later on in Isaiah's prophecy we find God saying, "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another" (Isa. 42:8). In the Ten Commandments he says, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:2-3).

This causes us to ask whether what is true in this absolute sense is true for us personally. Jesus is Lord. There is no one beside him. But is he Lord in our lives? Or is he forced to compete with our own conflicting

loyalties? Does his train fill the temple of our soul? Or does he occupy just a corner of the throne room while we try to crowd many other items in also?

Some try to crowd many things in. We try to crowd in our own plans for our lives. We try to crowd in other people. Some of us crowd in our successes or the good opinion of our friends.

Then we are disturbed when our lives seem cluttered and disorganized and when they seem to have no meaning. If that is so for you, you need to learn to let other things go. Let Jesus have his rightful place and learn to pray with true sincerity, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." It is rightly said that either Jesus is Lord of all or he is not Lord at all. So allow him to be what he must be and certainly will be one day. The Bible says, "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:25). It also says, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).

Humility and Service

The third element in Isaiah's vision was a sight of those angelic beings that wait on God to do his bidding. Isaiah calls them "seraphim," the only occurrence of this name in the Bible. He says each had six wings: "With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying" (6:2). Here a great deal is suggested. In saying that they covered their face, he is saying that they were *reverent,* for they did not consider themselves worthy even to gaze upon God. In saying that they covered their feet, he speaks of *self-effacement.*

"Seraphim" probably means "the burning ones," so they are glorious also, as is God. Yet they did not want any eyes to settle on them, but on God only. Finally, he speaks of the wings that they used to fly. This speaks of *service,* for they used these to do God's bidding.

Would we serve God? Then here is a picture of what is required: humility, self-effacement, and readiness to respond. The seraphim are a pattern for such service.

Moreover, they are a reminder of the resources that are available to God in accomplishing his purposes and protecting those whom he has promised to protect. For one thing, these angelic powers were available to the Lord Jesus Christ during the days he spent on earth. In the Garden of Gethsemane, after Peter had sought to defend him against the soldiers who had come to arrest him, Jesus said, "Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" (Matt. 26:52-54).

That same lesson is demonstrated in the story of Elisha and his young servant at Dothan. Ben Hadad, the king of Syria, had been fighting against the king of Israel at this time; but every time he made plans to attack Israel, God revealed the plans to Elisha, Elisha told the king of Israel, and the Jewish armies escaped. Ben Hadad thought that there was a traitor in his camp. But when he was told the truth he determined to capture Elisha. One night, when Elisha was at Dothan with his servant, Ben Hadad surrounded the city so that at daybreak, when the servant went out (probably to get water) he saw the soldiers, horses, and chariots, and was terrified.

"Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" cried the servant.

Elisha responded, "Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then he prayed, asking God to open the young man's eyes so that he might see the true situation. God opened the eyes of the servant so that he saw "the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6:17). We may apply these stories personally, noting that all the glory and power that surrounds the court of our Lord is also available for the defense of those who are his servants.

Holy, Holy, Holy

The fourth thing that Isaiah noticed was the worship given to God by these hosts of heaven. "They were calling to one another," we are told. "'Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds moved and the temple was filled with smoke" (6:3-4). Worship means to acknowledge God's worth, that is, to take up his attributes and to remember them before him one by one. Is it not interesting, therefore, that the attribute of God that most impressed these angelic beings, who knew him so well, was holiness? If you stop any normal person on the street and ask what is the most important of God's attributes, the answer you will almost always get today is "love." Well, that is important; but it is not what most impresses those who see God face-to-face. Those who see God or have a striking revelation of God are always impressed with his holiness. Thus, it was with Isaiah himself. "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty" (v. 5). It was the same with Peter: "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8).

If this is so, then holiness should obviously characterize the lives of those who are God's people. All the attributes are important, of course. We should be wise, as he is wise. We should love one another. We should be merciful. But above all we should be holy. We should be increasingly freed from the power of sin in our lives.

Isaiah's Commission

All this is what Isaiah saw. But it would not be right to stop at this point without at least suggesting the effect of this entire vision on his life. For the point of this is that the same effect will be seen in our lives if we catch a vision of God either through his vision or else directly from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Actually, Isaiah had three visions. The first was a vision of God; we have looked at that most carefully. The second was a vision of himself;

for having seen God in his holiness, he recognized afresh that he was a sinner. Finally, there was a vision of service. This came about when Isaiah confessed his sin, was cleansed of his sin by God, heard God's voice saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" and then responded, "Here am I. Send me." Moreover, our text tells us what he did when he was sent: "Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him." Isaiah had more to say about the Lord than any other Old Testament writer. He tells of his humiliation and glory, his nature and names, his atonement and future reign. So should it be for us. If we have truly seen Jesus and then have confessed our sin and been cleansed of it, we too will want to speak of Jesus as the faithful incarnation of our God.

Chapter 162.
A Silent Majority?

John 12:42-43

Is it possible for a person to be a secret believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it possible to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and our Savior from sin and truly to be committed to him and yet be silent about it? Is it possible to believe in Jesus with our whole hearts and not confess him openly?

These questions are pertinent in the light of our text, for it tells us that although the Jewish people as a whole rejected Jesus during the time he was on earth, nevertheless many did believe on him even though they did not confess him publicly. "Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God" (vv. 42-43). On the surface, the text seems to say that silent belief is possible, for they "believed" on Christ yet "did not confess him." At the same time the language is such that we naturally wonder if the belief involved was

genuine. We can hardly avoid contrasting these verses with Christ's own statement recorded in Luke 12, in which he says explicitly, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also ackowldge before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God" (vv. 8-9).

These verses are fascinating and instructive. Yet I must confess that, even after studying them carefully, I am still not sure what final answer they give to our questions. Was the belief of these men genuine? Were they really a believing majority, though silent? If they were, it is certainly an abnormal situation; and we are warned by it. If they were not, we are encouraged to make clear by a public confession whatever faith in Christ we may have.

Secret Believers

It is easy to outline these verses, for the statements depend on three verbs: believe, confess, and love. The first two tell what the men involved did; they seem to be contradictory. The third verb explains the situation.

The first thing that is said of these men, then, is that they believed on Jesus. This is John's usual phrase for speaking of true belief (6:40, 47; 7:38; 9:35; 10:42; 11:45; 12:11, 44, 46; 14:12; 17:20). What is more, they tell us that *many* believed and that these were among the *rulers* of the people and not just among the masses. In light of the verses that come just before this statement, which tell us that the majority did not believe because the Scriptures had foretold a general rejection of Jesus by his people, the statement that some nevertheless did believe is significant. It is John's way of saying that unbelief is never total, that human responsibility persists regardless of the biblical prophecies, and that (regardless of the depravity of the age) God always preserves to himself a remnant. We remember that it is a characteristic of this book that after having spoken of unbelief, John almost always adds that nevertheless some followed Jesus (7:31; 10:3942; 11:45; 12:10-11).

At this point, then, it would seem that the belief of these rulers was genuine. And if this is so, then the message is the same as the one Paul gives in discussing the unbelief of the masses of Israel in Romans 11. "I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: 'Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me'? And what was God's answer to him? 'I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace" (vv. 1-5). I repeat, then, that if the belief of these rulers was genuine, then we have a marvelous illustration of the grace of God in preserving his remnant. For here, even at the time of the crucifixion of the Lord, there were those who believed on him.

On the other hand, suppose that theirs may not have been a genuine faith. Suppose they did not believe to the point of actually committing themselves to Jesus. Still they believed intellectually and were at least sympathetic. Who can tell what they might have done had someone only spoken to them and sought to draw them to a more open commitment?

We should be encouraged by that in our witnessing. At times it seems as if all are openly hostile or at least indifferent to the claims of Christ, and we feel ourselves defeated even before we begin to speak to them of Jesus. But we cannot see their hearts, and it may well be that many of those to whom we speak actually already secretly believe a great deal of what we have to say and only need a small degree of encouragement in order to make an open profession. Here Matthew Henry writes most perceptively: "The truth of the gospel has perhaps a better interest in the consciences of men than we are aware of. Many cannot but approve of that in their hearts which yet outwardly they are shy of. Perhaps these chief rulers were *true* believers, though very weak, and their faith like smoking flax. ...Some are really better than they seem to be. Their faults are known, but their repentance is not; a man's goodness may be

concealed by a *culpable* yet pardonable weakness, which he himself truly repents of. The *kingdom of God comes not* in all *with* a like *observation;* nor have all who are good the same faculty of appearing to be so."

If this is the case, then we who have confessed Christ openly may be greatly encouraged and may make every effort to "lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees" and lead many to an open confession of Christ unto salvation.

Cost of Discipleship

At this point, however, we have said everything positive that we know to say about these secret believers. For having said that they "believed on" Christ, the text goes on to add that nevertheless "they did not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue." They believed, in some sense; John says so. But, having said this, there is no more good to add.

But perhaps even here some small good may be said. For it is at least true, is it not, that they recognized the true cost of discipleship, even though they were unwilling to pay it. What was the cost? In their case it involved what we would call excommunication. It involved being barred from public worship. It involved being excluded from the religious life of their fellow men. It involved the loss of the sacrifices as an atonement for sin. It involved loss of position. It involved becoming somewhat of a pariah, an outcast, one to be kept from the society of decent people and to be spoken of to children as a warning of the consequences of sin. These were no small items, particularly for those who had been leaders in Israel. They were costly—too costly. So, although these men wished to believe on Christ and confess him, and although they recognized the cost of such discipleship, they would not pay the price and so kept silent.

They were trying to do something that ultimately is impossible—to be secret disciples. Someone has said that secret discipleship is a contradiction in terms; for either the secrecy kills the discipleship, or

else the discipleship kills the secrecy. Perhaps it was the latter. Perhaps they eventually came out for Jesus. But we do not know what happened. We only know that they ran a great risk. For, having failed to confess him, there is always the other alarming possibility, that they fell away.

I wonder who those are who are trying to be secret believers today. Are you one? Are you one who believes in Christ but who is willing to have others deny him and never raise a word in his defense?

I wish I could get through to you, if that is the case. I wish I could show you that this is not true discipleship as the Bible speaks of it. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is one who faced precisely this problem in his day and who wrote a book about it. He served in the state church in Germany, a church in which many claimed to be believers and yet never thought of paying the cost of confessing Jesus openly. Bonhoeffer fought such a practice, calling it "cheap grace," and by contrast called for a grace that was "costly." He wrote, "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

"Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy for which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble. It is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him....

"Such grace is *costly* because it calls us to follow, and it is *grace* because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ.* It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is *costly* because it cost God the life of His Son: 'Ye were bought at a price,' and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is *grace* because God did not reckon His Son too

dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered Him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God."

As I reason along these lines I find myself thinking that these rulers of the people were not children of God after all. I find myself anxious that all who think they believe should be Christ's true and open followers. Costly? Yes, Jesus never said otherwise. But still it is the only wise thing to do. Remember that our Lord asked perceptively, "For what good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

For Men or God?

The third of John's verbs is the verb "love" by which he gives an explanation of what would otherwise be totally contradictory and confusing. These men believed on Christ; yet they did not confess him. Why not? One answer is that they did not want to be excommunicated from the synagogue. But why did they value that so highly? The man who had been born blind was excommunicated; yet he willingly endured that for the joy of knowing Jesus. What was wrong with these rulers? John gives us the explanation by the word "love," explaining that they did not confess Christ because ultimately "they loved praise from men more than praise from God." There is a wonderful expression of irony in this verse that we will miss if we look only at the English translation. The English says that the believing rulers loved the "praise" of men more than the "praise" of God. This is technically correct as a translation. The difficulty, however, is that the word rendered "praise" is not the normal word for "praise" but rather the word that is almost always elsewhere translated as "glory," the word *doxa*. Why does John use this word? The answer is seen in verse 41, in which John writes of the great vision of Isaiah, saying, "Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory [*doxa*] and spoke about him." Verse 43 refers back to verse 41, as if to illustrate the folly of preferring any earthly glory, however impressive, to that overwhelming and magnificent glory that belongs to God.

John tells us that these rulers had a scale of values into which, on the one side, they put the praise of men and, on the other, the praise of God. There was much to be said for the praise of God. They knew that by confessing Christ they should be praising God and should be approved by him. On the other hand, there was even more to be said for the praise of men, so they reasoned. This is a world in which men and women operate on the basis of mutual esteem. It was good to give deference to those in high positions, and it was enjoyable to receive such deference from others. They wished to be thought well of by their superiors and to be praised by those who were beneath them in the social scale of their culture and age. In this scale the followers of the Nazarene had nothing to offer; they had lowly positions and were looked upon with contempt by all who seemed to be pillars in Jerusalem. In this balance the praise of men predominated; and the rulers concluded, to their eternal hurt, that it was better to be thought well of by men than to be accepted by almighty God.

How sad this all is, and how tragic! "No doubt," as Barclay writes, "these rulers thought themselves wise and prudent men; no doubt they thought that they were playing safe. But their wisdom did not extend to remembering that the opinion of men might matter for the few years in which they lived upon this earth; but the judgment of God matters for all eternity."

A Bold Confession

We come at the end to the question with which we began. Is it possible for a person to be a secret believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? It seems to my mind that the question is still unanswered by this text, though I tend to think that the weight is on the side of secret belief being an ultimate impossibility.

But does it matter? It does to the extent that these questions teach us the meaning of true discipleship and motivate us to take a forthright and public stand for Jesus. What does this text teach about discipleship after all? First, it teaches that belief in Christ and confession of Christ properly belong together. Possibly, just possibly, one can believe in Christ and fail to confess him, whether from fear of what others might

think or from some other cause. But this is clearly abnormal and not at all to be praised. In normal belief, confession follows inevitably. So much is this the case that Paul can link the two inseparably, as he does in writing to the Romans. "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus, is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Rom. 10:9-10).

Second, the text teaches that even granted the possibility of such secret discipleship, nevertheless belief without confession is dangerous. Belief may win out. But silence may stifle belief instead, as indeed it seems to have done with these rulers. Did they later come out for Christ publicly? Were they among the three thousand who believed at Pentecost or the five thousand who, we are told, believed later? We do not know.

Finally, the verses teach us the relative value of God's approval as over against the variable and passing praise of men. Ultimately only God's approval matters. Who cares if men should mock us? Who cares if we should lose the esteem of this world's beautiful people? What matters if we lose everything, so long as we have God's approval? Do we have these values? Do we think in these terms? God grant that we might and that, as a result, we might be bold to confess Christ openly.

Chapter 163.
What Jesus Said

John 12:44-50

The most obvious division in the Gospel of John occurs at the end of chapter 12, for up to this point John has been dealing with what the Lord Jesus Christ did publicly—his miracles, public teaching, and healings—while after this, from chapter 13 through the end of the book the ministry of the Lord becomes a private one directed toward his

disciples. These last chapters contain the beloved final discourses, plus the record of Christ's death and resurrection.

This makes the verses that end chapter 12 particularly important; for in them John sums up what Jesus has said and done and reflects upon it, thereby also commending the teachings of Christ to any who may not yet be Christians. This has been true of all these final verses, of course, beginning with verse 37; but it is particularly true of the verses to which we come now. These last verses (vv. 44-50) contain what we can only call a resume of Christ's teaching. These are not the last words Christ spoke publicly—the last words he spoke publicly are recorded in verses 35 and 36—but they are a final summation of his teaching.

In them, Jesus speaks, first, of his relationship to the Father (vv. 44-45). This involves his deity and is very important. Second, he speaks of himself as the "light of the world" (v. 46). Third, he speaks of the danger of unbelief (vv. 47-49). Finally, in the last verse, there is a command to believe (v. 50).

Knowledge of God

We begin, then, with the deity of Jesus. The importance of this is explained by the Lord himself in saying, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me he sees the one who sent me." The importance of the deity of Jesus Christ is that we know God only in him; and if the Lord Jesus Christ is not God, then we do not know what God is like because we have no basis for saying anything about him.

If God does not intervene in history to speak of himself (which is what we have in Scripture), and if he does not act to show himself (which is what we have in Jesus Christ), then we have no knowledge of him. We can hold conferences. We can say, "I think God must be a being who cares for us; because we care for one another God must care for us." But that is all inferential. It may be right, but we do not *know* that it is right. On the other hand, when God intervenes to tell us about himself in Scripture—through men who, as Peter says, were "borne along by the

Holy Spirit"—then we have sure knowledge about God. That is why the Word is important. And when God intervenes in history in Jesus Christ to give us not just words but also to show us a personality, then we know him personally.

What is God like? The answer is that God is like Jesus. That is the importance of the deity of Jesus Christ. There are other important truths connected with this, of course. If Jesus Christ is not God, Jesus could not have died for our sin. If he were just a man, he had to die for his own sin.
That is part of it, and there is more. Nevertheless, in terms of our knowledge of God, which this Gospel, written to a Greek world very much concerned with knowing God, emphasizes, the deity of Jesus Christ is important in that it is the ultimate and only solution to knowing him.

Do you think that God is love? You know that God is love because Jesus Christ is love and showed it by dying for us. Do you think that God is holy and righteous and good? Do you want to know that God is filled with wisdom, that he understands you, that he is able to help you in any extremity? You know that because of Jesus. Therefore we, as Christians, are not left in the dark as to what God is; we do not find ourselves saying, "Oh, I wish I knew what he is like! If only I could know him, that would certainly be satisfying!" We are not in the position of those who make that kind of a statement. Rather we are those who turn our eyes to the Jesus we find in the Scriptures and say, "There is our God revealed." And we love him and worship him because of it.

Escape from Night

The second thing Jesus says is that he is "a light" come into the world in order that whoever believes on him should not abide in darkness. This is another great theme of the Gospel. John speaks of it in the opening chapter, for instance, describing the Lord Jesus Christ as both light and life. Then in two great texts later on—once in the eighth chapter, verse

12, and once in the ninth chapter, verse 5—the Lord Jesus Christ says explicitly, "I am the light of the world."

What does it mean that Jesus is this world's light? It means several things. First, it means that apart from him this world is in darkness. That does not mean that there are therefore absolutely no glimmerings of what we might call light. Certainly man was made in the image of God and retains something of that image even after the fall, although in a debased form. Our minds, as partial remnants of that image, can think God's thoughts after him. They can provide and disseminate a certain degree of light in human thought and philosophy. But our minds cannot do this in spiritual things. That is the point. And that is why the world is in such deep darkness. The world can understand mechanics, science, art, interpersonal relationships, and many other subjects. But spiritually, it has no light at all. Jesus is the One who came to impart light in order that we might see what goodness, truth, and righteousness are, and above all might see what God himself is.

When the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world and shone as God's light, he exposed the darkness of the world as no one had ever done previously. And, of course, those who had an invested interest in things as they were hated him for exposing their darkness and eventually had him crucified.

It is interesting and helpful to review the claim "I am the light of the world" in the contexts of the two stories in which it occurs in John's Gospel. Take the eighth chapter, first of all. There the sentence occurs in verse 12. But what occurs in verses 1-11? In those verses John tells the story of the woman taken in adultery, which story reveals the hatred and ruthless activity of Christ's opponents more than anything else in the entire Gospel. These men said, "Perhaps we can catch him in this way. We know that he preaches love and forgiveness. We also know that he pretends to speak for God. Let us catch him in a situation in which he will be forced to choose between love and God's law. If he says to forgive, we will say, 'What kind of a prophet is this that speaks against the law of Moses?' If he says to obey the law, we will say, 'What is all this talk about love?' We will discredit him." Eventually someone

thought of confronting him with a woman who had been caught committing adultery. It was brilliant, they thought; it fit the bill perfectly. It was a good capital offense by Mosaic law, yet it was also the sort of thing that would draw out sympathy. So they set it up. Probably they enticed the woman; at least one of them did. Then they trapped her, making sure, of course, that they had two eyewitnesses. They peeked through the keyhole. Then they dragged the poor woman off to see Jesus. Imagine going to such lengths just to catch Jesus Christ!

Jesus said, "All right. You want to operate by the law. Let us operate by the law. The law requires two witnesses. Who is going to witness? Who has a pure enough heart to stand up and condemn this woman?" It was certainly not going to be one of those who had seen her, because under Jewish law, entrapment was just as reprehensible as it is under our law. Besides, they were guilty of other sins also. So under Christ's gaze they all just faded away one by one, and in the end there was only one person who could have accused her, the Lord himself. He said, "We have operated under the law, but there is only one witness now. The law cannot function, for it requires two witnesses. Therefore I now choose to operate on the basis of my grace based upon the death that I am going to provide as an atonement for sin." So he forgave her, saying, "Go, and sin no more."

"I am the light of the world." A great light! But that light also reveals the terrible darkness of the human heart.

When one turns to the next chapter of John's Gospel, he finds Christ's statement in another context. Here is a man who had been born blind. He had lived all his life, thirty-eight years, in this state. He had never seen the sun. He had never seen a tree, a stone, a lamb. He had never seen a person. This man had moved around the city of Jerusalem by touch for all these many years. At last, however, the Lord singled him out and healed him. And what happened? The healing had taken place on the Sabbath, and these same leaders were angry that Jesus was breaking their Sabbath regulations. They did not care at all about the man who had been healed. So they dragged the man in, interrogated

him, and in exasperation eventually excommunicated him. He had not done anything. He had just been a passive victim of a healing. Yet they threw him out, thereby revealing the darkness of their own hearts. They preferred ecclesiastical rules, regulations, and liturgies to God's transforming work within the life of a man or a woman. Jesus was "the light of the world," but these rulers were in darkness.

Then, too, it is not only that the world is in darkness and that Jesus is the light. This is not the only thing Jesus says here. Jesus also says that it is possible to be delivered out of darkness. If the world is in darkness, we are in darkness. But Jesus Christ does not come just to reveal our darkness, to say, "Look! You are in darkness, and darkness it is." He comes to lift us out of our darkness by means of his marvelous light. He says, "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."

To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ—that is the solution! He is the light. So if we come to him and depend upon him, we have light and walk in his light. Moreover—because this is not just external, because it is also an internal transformation—we even become, wonder of wonders, what he himself calls us: "sons of light." That is, we come to partake of his nature through believing on him.

Judgment Coining

There is a third point, beginning with verse 47. It is what I would call the danger of unbelief. "As for the person who hears my words but does not believe, I do not judge him," says Jesus. "For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it."

Here Jesus speaks of a future day of judgment. He comes in grace. Indeed, he comes in grace to all of us. This is the day of grace. He offers himself as the Savior. But Jesus does not mince words when he says that if you reject him now, you are going to face his words in a

future day that will not be a day of grace but will be a day of judgment, and that in that day you will be required to answer for everything you have done and said. You will have to answer for all your rebellion. Is that not significant—that there is a future day, that the future day is a day of judgment, and that the words of Jesus will judge us in that day?

Some time ago, when I was speaking at a theological conference, a professor in one of our theological seminaries stood up and said, "We have got to get it into our heads that nothing in life is ever going to change. Things are as they are today, and they are going to continue as they are indefinitely. The Lord Jesus Christ is never going to come back." Fortunately, the apostle Peter had warned me what to think about such a person, because he had said several thousand years ago that in the last times scoffers will come saying, "Where is this 'coming'? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it did since the beginning" (2 Peter 3:4). Moreover, he had warned me to pay no attention to them, saying, "Do not forget this one thing. ...With the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (vv. 8-9).

Do you think that this world will continue indefinitely? A person has a right to his opinion, I suppose. But I believe the word of the Lord Jesus Christ who said that all things will not continue as they are, that a future day of judgment is coming, and that all men and women will in that day have to answer for what they have said and done.

How will you answer? What will you say when God asks you, "What right do you have to come into my heaven?" Will you say, "I have done many good things"? God will answer, "Not good enough; my standard is perfection." Or will you say instead, "I come not on my own merit but solely on the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for me. I have nothing in myself by which to commend myself to you. But Jesus died in my place. He paid the price of my sin. He bore the punishment for my transgression. Through believing on him I have received a new life." That is the only basis on which any man or woman will be saved.

So we must come to that now, to that commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ about which John speaks.

A Command to Believe

The last point is in verse 50: "I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say." I find the word "commandment" to be most interesting. Jesus says that God's *commandment* is life everlasting. But what commandment is this? What command is life everlasting? Only this: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." That is God's commandment.

Today, in much of our evangelism, we treat the offer of salvation as nothing more than an invitation—an invitation to come and believe on Jesus, to give one's heart to the Savior. This is true in one sense, of course. The Lord Jesus Christ did say, "Come to me all who are weary and burdened." But we must remember that this is not all that can be said. The offer of salvation is an invitation, but it is an invitation that is at the same time a command. When Paul preached at Athens he talked about the spiritual ignorance of the Athenians that, he said, God "overlooked" for a time, but now he "*commands* all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). In the same way, on the day of Pentecost, Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). This is not something to be toyed with; this is not something to be delayed. God is our master, and he orders us to turn from sin and to respond to him.

I do not want to seem harsh. Of course, the call to believe on Jesus is an invitation. It is out of love that the Lord Jesus Christ offers the command, speaks the words. It is out of love that God calls upon us to repent. But, at the same time, the matter of belief is not optional. It is required of us. Therefore, to fail to believe is not just a misfortune. It is sin.

Will you believe? Jesus says, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." He says, "I have come into the world as a light." Will you allow him to be your light, your Savior?

The Gospel of John, Volume 4

Peace in Storm (John 13-17)

by

James Montgomery Boice

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To him who,
having loved
his own,
loved them unto the end

Preface

The lengthy section of John's Gospel beginning with 13:1 and concluding with 17:26 contains probably the best-known and most-loved words of religious instruction ever uttered by any religious teacher. It is not hard to see why. For here, on the verge of his own horrible suffering and death by crucifixion, this one, who claimed to be God, speaks out of the peace he possessed to tell his disciples how to experience peace in tribulation.

It is not that Jesus was unaware of what lay before him or that he was unmoved by it. On the contrary, he had repeatedly foretold his crucifixion, saying that "the Son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise" (Mark 10:33-34). Again, Jesus had said of his pending death, "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour" (John 12:27). No, Jesus was not unaware of the suffering that was to come, nor was he unmoved by it. It is simply that he had found the secret of peace in storm, or rather that he was himself the peace in whose shelter those who believed in him might cluster.

This is the message of these famous and final discourses of Jesus of Nazareth, and hence also of this, the fourth volume in my five-volume expository commentary on John's Gospel. The questions it asks are:

"Do you want peace?" and "Are you willing to receive it at the point where alone Jesus indicates it may truly be found?"

As has been my pattern in the other volumes in this series, I have occasionally deviated from a strict exposition of these chapters to deal at somewhat greater length with a subject suggested by them. In earlier volumes this procedure has been followed by a study of witnessing, baptism, the Sunday-versus-Sabbath question, the Scriptures, Christ our Good Shepherd, and death. In this volume I devote three special studies to the doctrine of heaven, eight studies to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and seven studies to the marks of the church enumerated by Jesus in his great high-priestly prayer recorded in chapter 17.

For those who have purchased the earlier studies, I point out that the five-fold division of the Gospel introduced in volume 1 is still being followed. Volume 1 deals with the coming of the light of the Lord Jesus Christ into this world (chapters 1-4). Volume 2 deals with the growth of hostility toward him on the part of the religious leaders of the day (chapters 5-8). Volume 3 deals with the words of the Lord in beginning to call out a people to himself from among Israel, beginning with his call of the man who had been born blind (chapters 9-12). This volume, volume 4, deals with the final discourses of Jesus and their message of peace in storm, as has been indicated (chapters 13-17). The final volume, number 5, deals with the last events of Christ's earthly life, culminating in his resurrection (chapters 18-21).

One of the much-appreciated blessings that I have experienced in the course of my ministry is the active support of the congregation of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, to whom these messages were originally preached. These dear people encourage me to spend a significant amount of my time in serious Bible study and exposition in order to prepare such messages. Also, Miss Caecilie M. Foelster, my secretary, has assisted me in the editing and proofing of this material, as she has in the preparation of the numerous other books I have written. I am especially thankful to her.

The book bears the dedication: "To him who, having loved his own, loved them unto the end." May this work serve to glorify him, and may he alone be glorified. Amen and Amen.

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Chapter 164.
Love Letters from the Lord

John 13:1

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 the apostle Paul writes that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for instruction, for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." But having acknowledged that this is indeed true, that all Scripture is God's gift to us and is of inestimable value, we nevertheless recognize that for one reason or another some sections of the Bible are particularly valuable and are therefore especially prized and loved by God's people. We come to such a section in this volume.

To many persons the Gospel of John, as the most intense and spiritual of the Gospels, is the "holy place" of Scripture. But if this is so, then these chapters, 13 through 17, which contain the final discourses of the Lord with his disciples just before his crucifixion and which conclude with his great high-priestly prayer on their behalf, are the "holy of holies." Nowhere in the entire Bible does the child of God feel that he is walking on more holy ground. For here, more than in many other portions of Scripture, he hears the voice of Jesus leading him into a greater understanding of his new place before the Father and consequently also of his new position in the world. These chapters contain teaching about heaven, the new commandment, the person and

work of the Holy Spirit, the mutual union of Christ with the disciples and the disciples with Christ, and prayer.

To what can we compare these chapters? They can only be compared to love letters, in this case love letters from the Lord. For here the One who is the great and faithful Bridegroom of the church speaks to those who are themselves the church and assures them of his special and enduring love for them.

Not for Everyone

This means that the truths contained in these chapters are not for everyone. They are for the
Lord's people only. We have one evidence for this in the fact that they were spoken only to the Twelve in the upper room and not more widely. This irritates some people, of course, for it suggests partiality on the part of God, and in their view partiality is both unjust and despicable. But such people do not recognize the nature of the partiality that is found here, nor do they recognize how much they practice partiality themselves, in some cases even with justification.

We can immediately see the justice of these chapters not being for everyone if we simply extend the idea of these being the Lord's love letters. What would we think of a man who, for instance, is married to one woman but who writes intimate and endearing letters to many other women whom he knows? We would call that man a philanderer, a hypocrite, a liar. We recognize at once that while he may rightly have friendly contacts with many persons, including other women, nevertheless the most intimate things, those that belong in a marriage, deserve to be spoken only between husband and wife. Marriage is a private relationship. Consequently, it must be partial. In the same way Jesus has taken unto himself a special people, the church. These are his bride. It is entirely fitting and even expected that he should have special, loving, and touchingly tender words for them only.

Is this partiality? Not at all! It is grace. For it is God, of his own sovereign will, choosing those whom he thus determines to save and

bless abundantly. This has nothing to do with any supposed merit in God's people, for there is none. It is simply that when men had rejected God, choosing to go their own way, God out of infinite mercy still elected to save and bless some. If he had not done so, not one soul would have been saved. That he has done so, is tremendous.

The World

It is not surprising in view of the special nature of these chapters that the verse that begins them makes the contrast between those who are Christ's own and those who are not, sharper than any other comparable passage in the Word of God. It is true that Paul does much the same thing in Romans 9 and 10. A similar contrast is found in Ephesians 2, and many times in the Old Testament. But nowhere is the contrast clearer and the categories involved more absolute. For here, in the first verse of John 13, we are at once introduced to those who are Christ's own, whom he loved faithfully until the end.

The verse says, "It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love."

Who are Christ's own? The answer has already been given many times in John's Gospel. They are those who have been given to Christ by the Father (6:37, 44). They are those for whom Christ was about to die (10:11, 15). They are those who were born, "not of natural descent, nor of human decision or of a husband's will, but born of God" (1:13). They are those to whom Christ gives eternal life, who shall never perish, and who therefore shall never be plucked from Christ's hand (10:28-29). What is the world? The world is the human race out of which Christ called them.

It is worth considering this term "world," for, as we pointed out in one of the studies toward the end of John 4, this is one of the most important concepts in the fourth Gospel. There are several Greek words that are translated "world" in our Bibles, but the one we are interested in is

kosmos, from which we get our word "cosmopolitan." *Kosmos* means "world." *Politēs* means "citizen." So a citizen of the world is a cosmopolitan. The Greek word *kosmos* occurs 185 times in the New Testament. But what is extremely interesting is that of these 185 occurrences of the word *kosmos,* 105 are in the books traditionally ascribed to John. There are 78 occurrences of the word in the Gospel, 24 in the Epistles, and 3 in the Book of Revelation. Moreover, the importance of the word in John's Gospel is made even more obvious when we compare its 78 occurrences to the 8 times it occurs in Matthew and the merely 3 times each it occurs in Mark and Luke.

What does *kosmos* mean? The answer to the question is a complex one, for the word is old and therefore in time has acquired multiple meanings. The word originally meant "an ornament," that is, a decorative object, the unique feature of which was its fine proportions or beauty. This meaning is preserved in our English word "cosmetic," though in this case the meaning has shifted from what is beautiful in itself to that which is used to improve features that perhaps are not. In time the word was applied to the universe or world globe, as the well-proportioned ornament of God. This meaning occurs in John 1:9 and 10, which tell us that the Light "that gives light to every man was coming into the world" and that "the world was made by him." Even here another meaning is also present, however, for verse 10 goes on to say that "the world [that is, the people in the world] did not recognize him."

Since *kosmos* was used to describe the "world globe," it was natural that it next came to denote
"the world of human beings." In this second sense we might also translate it as "the human race." It is said of the world in this sense that God loved it and gave his only Son for it (John 3:16), that it is the object of his saving purposes (John 3:17), that Jesus died for it (1 John 2:2), that he is its Savior (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14). It must be understood of this use of the word that it refers to the human race collectively and not necessarily to each individual, otherwise the verses

cited would imply a universal salvation of all men that is clearly repudiated elsewhere.

The third and major use of the word *kosmos* is the one that occurs in our text and that comes to dominate the remaining chapters of John's Gospel. This usage also signifies the world of human beings, but with the additional thought that this world stands in rebellion against God. At times we may translate this use of *kosmos* as "the world system," including the world's values, pleasures, pastimes, and aspirations. It is said of the world in this sense that the world does not know God (1 John 3:1), that it rejected Jesus (John 1:10-11), and consequently that it also does not know and therefore also hates his followers (15:18-21; 17:14). This sense of the word is involved in every instance in which Christ's own are distinguished from the world. For example, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first" (15:18). Or again, "I have given them your words and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world" (17:14).

In summary we may say that, in the first sense, Christians are to receive the world and be thankful for it, for it is God's gift. In the second sense, they are to love the world and seek to evangelize it, for God also loves the human race. In the third sense, however, believers in Christ are to reject the world and then by God's grace also order their lives according to an entirely different set of values.

All Things for Some

The difference between God's relationship to the world and his relationship to his own has sometimes been stated in this way. God has done *some things for all men,* that is, everyone in the world. He has created them, sustained them, kept them from the worst that is possible, even tolerated them and thus kept them for a time from hell. On the other hand, God has done *all things for some men.* These are his own. They do not lack and will never lack any good thing.

What has God done for his own? In one sense the chapters we are to study are themselves the full answer to that question. The answer will

come in fullness only as we study them. But as we stand at the threshold of these chapters cannot avoid at least a partial answer by way of expectation. The answer has at least six parts.

1. The first and greatest teaching of these chapters is that Jesus specifically loved those who are his own. This is how the section begins: "Jesus ... having loved his own who were in the world ... showed them the full extent of his love" (13:1). It ends with: "I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them" (17:26). It is not necessary to say at this point that there is no love of God for the world in general. There is a sense in which the love of God extends to all people. It is only necessary to say that the love of which we are speaking here is a special, saving love as a result of which those who are Christ's own become his own and are kept by him. For having loved *them*, "he showed [and continues to show] *them* the full extent of his love."

While this undoubtedly gives some special privileges to those who are his own, it also gives them equally special obligations. For if they are loved, they also are to love. In this lies the basis for Christ's new commandment. "A new command I give unto you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (13:34).

2. The second great teaching of these chapters is that Jesus has gone to prepare a place known as heaven for his people. We are not told a great deal about heaven or what awaits us there. But we are told that in it there is a place for us who believe in him, and we are also promised that he will return one day to guarantee that we get there. "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am" (14:2-3). Even if heaven did not exist, the love of the Lord that we have come to experience here on earth would be wonderful in itself. But, in addition to this, there is heaven. In this promise we learn that the

fact that the Lord loved his own "to the end" does not merely mean "to the end of Christ's life" or even "to the end of our lives." Rather, it means "to the very end," "to the uttermost." His love for us will never end; it is eternal.

3. During these last discourses, the disciples were naturally troubled, for they had been told that the Lord, whom they loved, would be leaving them in order to return to the Father. In this context, Jesus' words about heaven were a source of great comfort. But there is another source also, and in this is found the third of Jesus' teachings. He tells the disciples, and therefore also tells us, that he is going to send a replacement for himself; that replacement, the Holy Spirit, would come and dwell within those who belong to Jesus. "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it does not see him or know him. But you know him; for he dwells with you, and will be in you" (14:16-17).

It is also the work of the Holy Spirit to lead the apostles into all the truth concerning Jesus, bringing it to their remembrance (14:26; 16:13), and to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8-11).

4. The fourth teaching of the Lord concerns his commissioning of the disciples to a special work, indeed a different work in each individual case. We find it in the fifteenth chapter. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit —fruit that will last" (v. 16). According to this verse, each of us has a spiritually fruitful work to perform. The promise of the Lord is that all we will accomplish in this area will remain.

5. We are told in these chapters that the Lord intercedes or prays for us. Here the seventeenth chapter is itself one long example. It is encouraging; for in these verses the Lord prays that his own might be kept from the evil that is in the world, that they might have his joy fulfilled in them, that they might be sanctified by means of the Word of God, that they might be one, and finally that they might

be with Jesus in heaven. Can God turn his back on a request made by his own dear Son? Of course not! We rightly sing,

The Father hears him pray, His dear anointed One;
He cannot turn away The presence of his Son.

So these requests are already fulfilled or are in the process of being fulfilled. They carry the same weight as direct promises. We shall be kept from evil. We shall have joy. We shall be one. We shall be with Jesus in heaven.

6. Finally, just as Jesus has prayed for us, so he invites us to pray, describing this as a new and blessed privilege. "I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete" (16:23-24).

These are the themes that are developed fully in this important fourth section of John's Gospel.

Perhaps the best comment about them is that of Paul in the great eighth chapter of Romans: "What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (vv. 31-32). God has indeed given us all things. But to whom much has been given, much shall also be required. May God use our study of John 13-17 to help us become increasingly his obedient and therefore also his exceedingly joyous children.

Chapter 165.

Having Loved, He Loved

John 13:1

In the previous study of the first verse of John 13 we saw that, while God has done some things for all men, he has, in addition to this, done all things for some. This is a tremendous truth. But, like all great truths, it almost cries out for an explanation. Fortunately the explanation is in our text also. For having distinguished between those who are of the world and those who are Christ's own, the verse goes on to say, "Having *loved* his own who were in the world, he showed them the *full extent of his love."* Love is the explanation. Jesus loves his own; he loves us. This is the entire explanation of why God has done all things for those who are his spiritual people.

No Explanation

When we say this, however, we must immediately recognize that love itself is unexplainable. For if we go on to ask, "But why did God love us? Why does Jesus love us?" there is just no answer to be given.

Obviously we are not loved because we are lovable, for we are not. It is true that some of us may be lovable to some others of us, but this is only when we look at the matter from a human perspective. From God's perspective there is nothing in us to make us even remotely desirable. He is holy; we are unholy. He is just; we are unjust. He is loving; we are filled with hatred and all forms of sin. In short, we are sinful and in willful rebellion against him. Yet he loves us. In fact, this is so great a marvel that God even uses it to commend his love to us. He says, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6-8).

God has not loved us because we first loved him; he is not merely returning our love. We did *not* love him. On this point the apostle John

writes clearly, "This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

Again, the Lord did not love us because of anything that we could do for him, for we had nothing to offer. He does not need praise; the angels praise him. He does not even need spiritual children; for, as Jesus said, he is able of stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even our numbers are not an asset. So why does God love us? The only answer is the one he gave Moses concerning the children of Israel. "The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers" (Deut. 7:7-8). The reason God loves us is that he loves us. Beyond that, his love is unexplainable. It is without reason, at least without reason known to us.

Empirical Data

If we were to stop at this point, I suppose that in that thought alone we would have enough to keep us pondering on the love of God for eternity. But there is more. For the verse that tells us that God loves without reason also tells us that God loves without variation and without end. His love is eternal. The verse says, "Having loved his own who were in the world, he showed them *the full extent of his love."*

We want to come back to that phrase, "the full extent." But before we do so we need to see the reasons God gives why we should believe that his love is eternal. We cannot see into the future; therefore, rationally at least, the future lends no evidence. Why should we believe in this everlasting quality of God's love? The answer is an empirical one. It has to do with observable data, particularly data from the past and present. First, there is the past: "Having loved." Second, there is the present: "he showed." This second occurrence is a past tense (an aorist); but the sense is present, for it refers to what Jesus was then doing and was about to do.

In other words, the verse calls our attention to the observable past and present love of Christ, and it is asking us to reason on that basis. Is not love his nature? Will not he who loved in the past and loves in the present also love in the future? If he loved his disciples to the end, will he not love us similarly?

Past and Present Love

What do we know about the love of God the Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ in the past? Obviously that is a big question, the answer to which can never fully be given. But we can suggest some areas in which the answer can be seen.

First, we can see the love of God in the creation of ourselves and other human beings. We refer at this point, not merely to the fact of our existence, for our existence in itself might prove nothing. We refer rather to the fact that in creating us God created us with a spiritual vacuum within that can be filled only by himself. In other words, he created us, not to a meaningless existence but to an existence that is the highest existence possible for any created object, namely, communion with the One who created it. So it is as Augustine said, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." The fact that we can know God and are restless until we do know him is proof of his love.

Second, God's love is seen in the fact that he, by the Holy Spirit's regenerating power has called us to himself. We have seen this several times in John's Gospel. We are told, on the one hand, that no one can come to God unless God draws him. In this fatal inability we measure the extent of our depravity. But then, on the other hand, we are told that God does draw some to himself and that none of these can be lost. In this we see God's love, for apart from the sweet drawing of that love, no one would ever come to him.

Third, we see God's love in Jesus' death for his people. This, if you will, completes the trinitarian formula, for in creation we see the love of the Father. In the effectual calling of God's people we see the love of the

Holy Spirit. In the act of redemption we see the love of Jesus Christ, the Son.

The love of the Lord Jesus Christ in dying for us may be illustrated by the following story as told by Harry Ironside. Many years ago, Czar Nicholas I of Russia knew a young man for whom he cared a great deal. He was the son of a good friend of his. Because of his interest in this young man, Nicholas had him assigned to a border fortress of the Russian army and caused him to be given charge of the money used for paying the soldiers. The young man started well. But he fell into bad habits, took to gambling, and eventually gambled away not only his own wealth but also a great fortune taken from government funds. He had taken just a few rubles at a time, but these had mounted up and become prodigious. One day he received notice that on the following day an official would be coming to inspect the books. The young man knew he was in trouble. So he took out the records to find out how great his debt was. He totaled the amount. Then he went to the safe, took out his own small amount of money, and counted it carefully. He subtracted the lesser from the greater. The debt was astronomical. As he sat looking at the final figure, the young officer picked up his pen and wrote in large letters, "A great debt; who can pay?" Then, because he did not see how he could face the terrible dishonor the next day held, he determined to kill himself with his revolver at the stroke of twelve.

The night was warm and drowsy. So as he waited for the midnight hour, in spite of himself the young man's head dropped lower and lower and he fell asleep.

It happened that Nicholas, who was in the habit of sometimes putting on the uniform of a common soldier and visiting the troops to see how they were getting on, did so this night, coming around to the halls of the very fortress in which the young officer was sleeping. Most of the lights were out, as they should have been. But when Nicholas got to the door of this one room he noticed a light shining under it. He knocked. No answer! He tried the latch and opened the door. There was the young officer, whom he recognized, asleep. He saw also the books and the money. The whole thing became clear in a moment. His first thought

was to awaken his young friend and place him under arrest. But as he read the young man's note, his heart went out to him. "A great debt; who can pay?" Moved by a generous impulse, the Czar leaned over, picked up the pen that had fallen from the hand of the sleeping officer, wrote just one word, and tiptoed out.

For an hour or so the young man slept. Then he suddenly awoke and, seeing that it was long past midnight, reached for the revolver. As he did so his eye caught sight of his note—"A great debt; who can pay?"—and under it the one word that had not been there before: "Nicholas." He was astonished. Dropping his gun, he raced to the files where the signature of the Czar was available. He pulled this out and carefully compared it with the signature on his note. It was the real signature. He said to himself, "The Czar has been here tonight and knows all my guilt; yet he has undertaken to pay my debt; I need not die." So instead of taking his life, he rested upon the word of Nicholas and was not surprised when, early the next morning, a messenger came from the palace bearing precisely the amount of money needed to satisfy the deficit. Later, when the inspector came, everything was found to be in order.

Thus did Jesus love us and pay our great debt. We are sinners. There is no possible way for us to atone for that sin. But Jesus has paid that debt. He has signed his name to our bankrupt account. No wonder we sing:

Jesus paid it all,
All to him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain—
He washed it white as snow.

That is the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for us as seen in the past. It is that to which God points us and directs our eyes. Thus has he loved. Who then can doubt that he will continue to love us unto the end?

Full Extent... unto the End

The phrase "the full extent" brings us to the second half of our text. The King James Version says "unto the end." It raises the question: Unto the

end of what? There are several answers.

First, it means "unto the end of the earthly life of Jesus Christ." Even the context suggests this, for the verse is given to us at the start of those chapters that tell of Christ's final ministry to his disciples prior to his crucifixion. We must admit that we are not always appreciative of this, for we take Christ's love for granted. Yet, if we would think of the possible hindrances to love both on his part and on the part of the disciples during these days, we would be more sensitive.

On his part there were great hindrances, as the verse indicates. It says, 'Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father," thereby indicating that Jesus knew clearly that he was about to die. So if we were to read that in those moments his thoughts turned from his own to himself so that, at least for a time, he ceased to love them or think about them, who could blame him? Yet knowledge of his impending death did not deter him. There were also hindrances on the part of the disciples. They were worldly, for instance. He thought spiritually. But every time he tried to teach them spiritual things, they interpreted his words on a worldly level. Moreover, they were dull. He explained great truths to them, and they did not understand. In fact, he had been explaining that he was to leave them to go to the Father, but they could not understand even this. Not one of the disciples was a fit companion for the Lord Jesus Christ. So if he had said to himself, "I have thought about these men long enough; I have done everything for them that I know how to do; it is time I thought of myself," who could blame him? No one!

Yet he loved them, fully and unselfishly, to the end of his life.

Second, he obviously also loved them to the end of their lives. True, he was to be the first to die. He died before Peter, James, John, or any of the others. But then he rose, and as the risen Lord he returned to bestow his own Spirit upon the disciples and then guide them and preserve them until the time when each would go to be with him in glory.

Finally, the phrase also means "to the very end," that is, "to the end of ends" or "without end," "forever." In Greek the word is *telos*, which

literally means "perfection." Jesus, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them perfectly. So we sing:

> The love of God is greater far
> Than tongue or pen
> can ever tell; It
> goes beyond the
> highest star, And
> reaches to the
> lowest hell.
> Oh, love of God, how rich and pure!
> How measureless and strong!
> It shall forevermore endure—
> The saints' and angels' song.

Such love is indeed forever. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loves them to the end.

Love Others, Love Him

How shall we apply these truths? On the one hand, we must apply them to believers, and, on the other, to those who are not yet believers. The word to those who believe on Christ is this: If this is the way in which God has loved us, then should we not love one another, and also fervently love him? We will never in this life love as he loved, but we can begin to try to love as he loved—unselfishly, without discrimination, without wavering. We should also serve him. For, as the hymn declares:

> Love so amazing, so divine,
> Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Again, there is a word for those who have still not become true Christians. If you are not yet a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, let me ask you a question that flows from everything I have been saying. If God loves like this, how can you afford to be without such a great love? There is no love on earth like it. Your husband or wife will not love you like this. Your children and parents will not love you like this. Your

neighbors and friends will not love you like this. Only Jesus Christ loves with a perfect and everlasting love! Moreover, one day you must stand before the judgment seat of his Father, whom you have offended by your ungodly conduct and by your rejection of his great grace. What will you do in that day—if you refuse the love of the Lord Jesus Christ? What will you do without having him to stand by you and say, 'This is one of my own; this is one for whom I died; this is one whose debt I undertook to pay; this is one I love unto the end"? Without such love you will be lost forever. Fortunately, the day of God's grace is still present; you may yet come to Jesus Christ as your Savior.

Chapter 166.
Love on Its Knees

John 13:2-15

Actions speak louder than words." This expression is not always true, but it is sometimes true. And in some instances it is only actions that speak at all. The need for action in some instances reminds me of the farmer who was stuck in the middle of the road with his donkey. The donkey had planted his feet firmly on the ground and would not move no matter what the farmer did. So the man stood there shouting at the donkey, kicking him and getting angrier all the time. While this was going on another farmer came down the road and immediately sized up the problem. "Do you want help?" he asked.

"I sure could use it," the first farmer answered. "But I don't think it will do any good. I've been shouting at this stupid donkey for half an hour, and he just won't budge."

"I can fix that," the second man answered. He went over to the side of the road, picked up a club, and then came back and hit the donkey between the eyes. After that he stood back and said "Gee haw!" in a normal tone of voice, and the donkey started off.

"I don't understand it," said the owner. "I yelled at him, and he acted as if he didn't even hear me.

You spoke in a normal tone of voice, and he moved off."

"That's true," said the second man, "but first I got his attention."

The right action is valuable in many circumstances, of course. It applies in child rearing, for instance. I have saved many useless words with my children by a well-timed use of a related attention-getting mechanism. Or again, it applies in teaching. Sometimes a gesture or an object lesson gets the point across faster and better than any number of words. True, on his last full night with his disciples just before his crucifixion, when he wanted to teach them many things, Jesus began his teaching, not with words that might have been missed by them but with two significant actions. The first was the washing of the disciples' feet, recorded in John 13:2-11. The second was the giving of the bread to Judas, recorded in John 13:21-30.

Why did Jesus perform these actions? The answer is that the disciples were preoccupied. We have already been told that they were terrified of the Jewish leaders; they suspected that Jesus was about to be arrested, and they were afraid that he would die and that they would die with him. Or, even if that were not the case, it might be that he would be taken and they be left. Nothing in their present circumstances had prepared them to hear his teaching. So Jesus acted boldly in order to get their attention.

Judas and Jesus

The first action we have in John 13 is that of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. But as John tells the story, he draws our attention, first of all, to the contrast between Judas, who was moved by Satan, and Jesus, who was motivated solely by love and by his knowledge of God the Father and his unique relationship to him. John writes, "The evening meal was being served and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus..." (vv. 2-3).

As we read these verses, stopping at that point, we can hardly miss the fact that John wishes to contrast the action of Jesus, who gave himself for his disciples, with that of Judas. We have here the humility of Christ, who washed the disciples' feet, versus the pride of Judas. There is faithfulness to the end, versus treachery and betrayal. Then, lest we miss the most important point, John also mentions the devil so we will see that the basic contrast is between Satan and God.

Satan's way, described vividly in Isaiah 14:12-14, is simply personal advancement at the expense of others, in this case at the expense of God. "How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'" The consequence of this satanic desire is destruction. For the passage goes on to say, "But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit" (v. 15).

On the other hand, there is the way of God, which is described in the case of Jesus in Philippians 2:5-8. "Your attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, bring made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross." The result of this course of action is honor for Jesus and blessing for those who are his own. 'Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (vv. 9-11).

Satan, like Judas after him, said, "I will think first of myself; and the first thing I will seek is my aggrandizement." God says, "You will actually go down to defeat." Jesus said, "I will surrender my life for my

brethren." God says, 'Therefore, you will be honored and will be a great blessing."

Christ's Motivation

The second thing we notice is Christ's motivation in washing the disciples' feet. Verse 3 goes on to say, 'Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God...." Here we are told three things about Jesus' state of mind as he performed this action. First, he knew that "the Father had put all things under his power." This speaks of Christ's *authority.* Second, he knew that "he had come from God." This speaks of his *divine origin.* Third, he knew that he was even then on the verge of returning "to God." This speaks of his *future glory.*

We notice that it was not in forgetfulness of who he was and where he was going, then, that Jesus washed the disciples' feet, but rather in full consciousness of it. It was not that he forgot he was God and so humbled himself. It was because he was God and wished to act as God that he did it.

A Parable

At this point we can begin to appreciate the significance of what Jesus did when he washed the disciples' feet, for he was obviously not giving just an example of humility. Still less was he instituting an additional sacrament, as some have imagined. What he was doing was giving a dramatic illustration of his entire ministry. In a recent book, entitled *Secrets of the Spirit*, Ray C. Stedman spells this out clearly. He writes, 'There can be little doubt that here Jesus was deliberately working out a parable for the instruction of his disciples. He was dramatizing for them the character of his ministry. He was showing them by this means what he had come into the world to do, and what he would send them out to do."

We can easily follow the meaning of the parable by comparing the verses from Philippians that I cited earlier with the events that John records. First, John tells us that Jesus *rose* from supper. This had

already been done in a far greater way when he rose from his throne of glory prior to his coming into this world. Second, he *laid aside his garments.* Paul in Philippians says that when he came into the world he laid aside that glory which was his so that he could appear as a true man and not blind with his celestial glory those who looked upon him. Next, he took a towel and *girded himself.* This was the garb of a servant, a role that, Paul says, he took upon himself. Finally, he *poured water into a basin* and began to wash the disciples' feet, just as in a few short hours he was to pour out his blood for the washing away of human sin by the atonement.

To see the end of the parable we need only skip over to verse 12, as Stedman notes. For there we read, "When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place...."
In the same way, Christ is even now highly exalted. Or again, as the author of Hebrews writes, "After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (1:3).

There is another way in which the spiritual nature of this parable is evident, and that is in the exchange between the Lord and Peter. Jesus had laid aside His clothes and had begun to go around the table washing the disciples' feet, presumably in an atmosphere of stunned silence, for this was the work of a slave and not that of a distinguished rabbi. However, when Jesus came to Peter, the impulsive Peter could stand it no longer so he blurted out, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

Peter, who was humble enough to feel the incongruity of having his feet washed by Jesus but not humble enough to refrain from telling his master what not to do, replied, 'You shall never wash my feet."

Jesus said, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

At this, Peter did an about-face and declared that in that case he wanted to be washed all over: 'Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and

my head as well!"

Jesus replied in conclusion, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." Here the somewhat confusing dialogue clears up, at least partially; for it is evident that Jesus is talking, not about physical dirt but about sin and the need to be cleansed from it. He is explaining that Peter (not Judas) is a justified person and therefore needs only cleansing from the contaminating effects of sin, not pardon from sin's penalty.

The image involved is of an oriental who would bathe completely before going to another person's home for dinner. On the way, because he would be shod in sandals and because the streets would be dirty, his feet would be contaminated. When he arrived at his friend's home, his feet would need to be washed, not his whole body. In a parallel way, those who are Christ's are totally justified men and women, but they do need constant cleansing from their repeated defilement by sin in order that the fellowship they have with the Father and with the Son might not be broken.

Jesus is telling Peter that he does not need to be born again and again and again. To be born again once is enough. Nevertheless, as regenerated people, we do need to come to Christ for cleansing.

Our Example

After the conversation with Peter, Jesus, we are told, resumed his place at the head of the table and began to explain to the disciples what he had done. He said, "Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (vv. 12-15).

What does this mean? Does it mean that we should go out and institute a new sacrament to be known as the sacrament of foot washing? Not at

all, though some have done this. What Jesus is talking about is humility and the need for God's people to take a servant role. He is simply saying, "If I, your Master, have played the servant role, you who are my servants should certainly play the servant role with one another." We are to care for those who can no longer care for themselves—our aged parents, the poor, orphans. We are to get close to those who are suffering and do everything in our power to alleviate their suffering. We are to open our homes to the lonely. Above all, we are not to take the first place in Christian gatherings but are to take a lower place that someone else might be honored.

Moreover, we are even to fulfill Christ's example in regard to spiritual defilement and cleansing, for this is what the parable is about. According to Christ's words to Peter, the cleansing of the feet symbolized the spiritual cleansing of Christians who have, nevertheless, fallen into specific sin. So if we are to follow Christ's example at this point, we must do as Paul admonished in writing to the Galatians: "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted" (6:1).

How do we seek to restore a brother who has fallen into some sin? How do we seek to wash the feet of such a person? We are to take the Word of God, with which we are all to cleanse our ways, and then gently, ever so gently, apply it to our brother that he might respond to it by the grace of God.

Notice the word "gently." In his commentary on these verses Harry Ironside points out that if we are going to wash another's feet, we ought to be careful of the temperature of the water. You would not go to anyone and say, "Here, put your feet into this bucket of scalding water." Nor would you ask him to place his feet in a bucket of ice water. It is just as bad to be too hot in approaching another person as it is to be too cold and formal. Stedman points out that in trying to cleanse others, some Christians do without water at all. They try to dry-clean feet. They scrape them free of dirt and unfortunately sometimes take the skin with

it. Instead of this, we who are spiritual are to approach the other person meekly and in love.

Chapter 167.
A Clue for Finding Happiness

John 13:16-17

I do not know what you consider to be the number-one desire of most people today, but I suspect that if I were to conduct a poll, in one form or another the answer that would come highest on the list would be "happiness." Above all else most people want to be happy. It is true that they do not always see this clearly; they even express it in different terms. Some might say that most of all they would like to be rich. Others might wish to be famous. Some might want to be loved. But basic to all these replies would be the desire to find happiness, however it might be supposed to come.

The difficulty, however, is that happiness is not easily attainable. We seek for it. Indeed, in this country the privilege of seeking for happiness is even declared to be one of our inalienable rights. But no one can guarantee happiness itself. So our founding fathers wrote wisely when they defined those rights as "life, liberty, and the *pursuit* of happiness." Liberty can be guaranteed. So can life, up to a point. But not happiness. Only the right to pursue happiness can be guaranteed to any individual.

But how do we pursue happiness, and in what direction? One man thinks that he will be happy if he can save ten thousand dollars. So he saves all he can; he gets his ten thousand. But he still is not happy. He thinks in terms of fifty thousand, then a hundred thousand. If he is able, he earns a million dollars, but still happiness eludes him. Why? Because happiness does not come through amassing a fortune. A Texas millionaire once said, "I thought money could buy happiness. I have been miserably disillusioned."

Some persons try to find happiness through fame, but fame does not guarantee happiness either. If it did, we would not hear of so many of the world's famous people committing suicide. Still other persons think that they will be happy with power. They run for a local political office and win. Next they aspire to the mayor's chair. If they become mayor, they want to be state senator. After this they think in terms of national politics. But still they are not happy. One of the world's greatest statesmen once said to Billy Graham, "I am an old man. Life has lost all meaning. I am ready to take a fateful leap into the unknown."

Knowing and Doing

If you are one who desires to find happiness (as most of us do) and if you have not been able to find it in any of the ways I have just listed, or others, then you should be interested in these words spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ nearly two thousand years ago. They are our text, and they contain a clue for finding happiness. "I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (13:16-17).

As we read these verses we notice at once that Christ's clue for finding happiness has two parts. The first part consists in knowing certain things. The second part consists in doing them. Obviously both are important.

Several years ago I was talking to a man who has approximately half a million dollars invested in the stock market. I asked him, "Did the recent market decline affect you greatly?" "It surely did," he answered.

"Did you have any idea that the market might go down?"

"That's the funny thing," he said. "About two months before the market tumbled, when the Dow Jones average was still high, we were having a meeting of a number of us who sometimes invested together. I remember saying in that meeting that the market simply could not continue as it was. I said that it would have to go back down. Surprisingly, everyone agreed. When I said that we ought to sell now,

they agreed to that too. But, you know, nobody did it. None of us sold. So when the bottom dropped out, all of us were left with losses."

Obviously it is the combination of knowing and doing that makes for success. Or, to put this in spiritual terms once again, it is the combination of knowing and doing certain spiritual things that leads to true happiness.

Jesus Is Lord

So what is it that the one who would truly be happy should know? These are short verses, but in spite of their length they suggest a number of important things. The first is *that Jesus Christ is Lord.* Jesus alludes to this when he says, "No servant is greater than his *master* (lord), nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him."

The problem that most of us have in finding happiness begins right here, for if we are honest, even as Christians, we must acknowledge that we frequently have the whole thing inverted. Jesus says that he is Lord and that we are his servants, but in actual fact, we act as if we are the Lord and he is the servant. Examine your prayers sometime and see if the greater part of your prayers does not consist of your telling Jesus what he should do for you and the far lesser part your asking what you can do for him. We say that Jesus is Lord. But in practical terms we want to make our decisions, choose our own way of life, and set our own courses of action.

When we do this, what we are actually doing is setting ourselves in the center of our own spiritual universe. And the difficulty is that we are not adequate as the center. Take this example from astronomy. In the early days of astronomy, before Copernicus, all work was done on the basis of the Ptolemaic system according to which theory all things revolved around the earth. The earth was the center of the system. The Ptolemaic system was not all bad. In fact, it was better than most people living today imagine. It could predict sunrise and sunset. It could predict new moons. To some extent it could even predict the course of the planets. But the difficulty with the Ptolemaic system is that it was

not always accurate, particularly in charting the course of the planets. In attempting to provide numerous adjustments for the erratic planetary movements the system eventually broke down. Besides, the Ptolemaic system did not allow for progress. New discoveries always went against it, and certain other discoveries were not even possible. What was wrong? The difficulty was not in the conclusions, for some of these were right. The difficulty was at the heart of the theory; for the sun, not the earth, was at the center of the solar system.

There is a close parallel in spiritual terms. Those who make themselves the center of the spiritual universe do get certain results. If they are selfish enough, they get most of what they want. If they are ruthless enough, they can keep others from taking it away from them or taking advantage of them. But in spite of such apparent success, the system is never quite accurate. Therefore, the happiness that is supposed to follow these devices eludes them. Moreover, there is no progress. In fact, things get worse and worse. Life gets straightened out only when by the grace of God we get ourselves out of the center and the Lord Jesus Christ in. For he is Lord, and it is only he who can give order to the system.

The second truth we find in these verses is that Jesus took *a servant role*. He is Lord, the Lord of glory. Still he divested himself of his lordly prerogatives in order to be made like his brethren and serve them, even to death. This is what the episode of the foot-washing is all about, of course. On the one hand, it shows Jesus in a servant role. On the other, it is a parable of his entire ministry in which the dominating thought is service. "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many," Jesus said (Matt. 20:28).

Ourselves, His Servants

The first two truths that the man who would be happy must know pertain to Christ: his position as Lord, and his role as servant. The next three truths pertain to ourselves.

To begin with *we are not greater than Jesus.* We acknowledge this verbally, but in actuality we often deny it by our actions. We say, "Of course we are not greater than Jesus." But we act out the opposite belief whenever we prefer our judgment to his judgment or think that we can manage without him. Jesus reminds us of the true nature of things when he declares, "*No* servant is *greater* than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him." We need to learn that we can do nothing without him.

The fourth truth in these verses is that *what is proper for Jesus is proper also for us.* How shall I live? What shall I do with my life? What shall my values be? Where shall I place my energies? We find the answers to these questions by looking to Jesus to see how he lived, what he did with his life, what his values were, and where he placed his energies. In other words, he is our example, as he said in the previous verse.

The fifth point is the climax of this argument. We have seen that Jesus is Lord, that he took a servant role, that we are not greater than Jesus, that what is proper for him is proper also for us. It follows, therefore, that *we also should be servants.* That is, we should all be ministers, for that is what the word "minister" means. It is the word *diakonos,* from which we get our word "deacon"—"servant." This is the clue for finding happiness.

As we read the other Gospel accounts of these last hours in which Jesus and his disciples were together, we soon discover that service was the issue of the moment. To begin with, in Matthew 20, which tells of the events of just a day or two before this, we read of the mother of James and John going to Jesus with the request that when Jesus came into his kingdom he would choose her sons to sit closest to him, one on his right hand and the other on his left. Obviously, these two disciples wanted the most prominent positions. But Jesus had to reply that this was not the nature of his ministry. He spoke of the cup that he was to drink and the baptism that he was to be baptized with. Then he said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever want to be

first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:25-28).

We would think perhaps that after that episode and lecture the disciples would have learned the lesson, and that the desire for the chief place among them might be forgotten. But this was not so. Apparently the conflict intensified and continued even into the upper room. For, if Luke is giving us an accurate chronology of this evening, we learn that even after the institution of the Lord's Supper "a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be the greatest" (Luke 22:24). It was at this point perhaps that the Lord divested himself of his clothing and performed the foot washing.

If we can learn from the disciples, we should learn that the desire to be foremost is so great in us that we can be maneuvering for prominence even as we come to the communion service. We should learn that taking the servant role is a great clue for finding happiness.

Our Commission

There is one more thing that we should know; it too is suggested in these verses. It is that *we are sent to be servants.* That is, so far as God is concerned, the servant role for us is not optional. It is our assignment, just as it was also the task of the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice that in the second half of verse 16 the Lord uses the verb "send" twice. In Greek these are different words: *apostolos*, from which we get the word "apostle" (it denotes a specially commissioned spokesman and representative of the Lord) and *pempsantos*, which is the word Jesus uses of his own commissioning by the Father. Both words occur in John's version of the Great Commission, in which Jesus says, "As my Father has sent me, I am sending you" (20:21). We are to be servants primarily because it is for this that God has called us, just as he called Jesus. If he has done this, we will not be fully happy in any other role.

Amen and Amen

We now come to the most neglected part of all. Up to now we have been talking about the first part of Christ's clue for finding happiness: knowing certain things. We have looked at six of them: (1) Jesus is Lord, (2) he took a servant role, (3) we are not greater than Jesus, (4) what is proper for him is proper also for us, (5) we also should be servants, and (6) we are sent to be servants. The second part, which is based upon these things, is that we should do them. "Now that you know these things," said Jesus, "you will be blessed if you do them" (v. 17).

We notice, of course, that this is more than mere knowing. Knowing is important, as we have seen. You cannot do unless you know. You must begin with knowing. Nevertheless, knowing is not enough; for many people know how to succeed and yet fail just because they do not exercise their knowledge.

Moreover, the second part of this clue for finding happiness is not knowing these truths in order that others might do them. Some of us use our knowledge in this way, that is, as a club or lever to get others to measure up to our standards and serve us. Husbands know just what their wives should do to make them happy. Wives know exactly what is wrong with their husbands. Young people are sure they know what their parents and everyone else should be doing. But this is not what Jesus says. In fact, in one sense it is even the opposite of what he says. For if this is the way you are thinking, I can guarantee that the results will be the opposite of what you want. The other person will not conform to your wishes, and you will not find happiness. Happiness comes not from knowing alone or from getting the other person to do what you know he or she should do but rather from knowing these truths and then doing them yourself.

Why is this so? Because in taking this role you will inevitably develop the kind of character that
God himself can bless. We find such character in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5:3-12. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit... blessed are those who mourn... blessed are the meek... blessed are they who hunger

and thirst for righteousness... blessed are the merciful... blessed are the pure in heart... blessed are the peacemakers... blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake."

We say, "But that does not make sense." Everything within us tells us that it is not the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers, or any similar type who is happy. We say, "Happy are the winners, the dominant, those who are waited upon." But we are wrong. Our way does not work. It is the words of the Lord Jesus Christ that should be trusted.

These verses begin with the words. "I tell you the truth." These words are translations of the words, "Amen, amen," and they mean 'Truly, truly." They mean, "Pay attention to this; it is true." The interesting thing about these words is that we frequently find them on the lips of Jesus, and every time we find them on his lips they precede the statement. That is, Jesus first calls attention to the truth of what he is about to say and then says it. On the other hand, we also frequently find these words on the lips of normal men and women. But in this case the words always come at the end of the statement, as they do, for instance, in our prayers. In our usage the words are therefore an acknowledgment of the truth of God. They are our way of saying, "So be it; let God be true and every man a liar." Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." Can your heart add, "Amen, amen," and then do them?

Chapter 168.
A Classic Prophecy

John 13:18-20

In the Reformation period of church history it was common to speak of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ under a threefold division of prophet, priest, and king. The word "prophet" referred to Christ's role in

speaking for God and as God. It dealt with revelation. The word "priest" referred to Christ's role in giving himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin, and also in interceding for his own with the Father. "King" referred to his rule both in heaven and in his church through the Holy Spirit.

This is a particularly interesting division in light of the functions of the Lord during his last days upon earth. Within twenty-four hours after the events recorded in John 13, which we are studying, Jesus was to die. That is, he was to exercise his priestly role by offering up himself as a perfect sacrifice for human sin. Within another three days he was to be raised from the dead and then ascend into heaven, from which he was to rule his church as King. In this chapter, as if to make the trilogy complete, Jesus speaks as a prophet. Moreover, this is not just in the sense of speaking for God, as he had indeed been doing all along, but in the full sense of the word; that is, by actually foretelling what was to come to pass. In these verses he says that one who for three years had been a member of the apostolic band was to betray him.

This is a classic prophecy. It takes only three verses, verses 18-20, but within these three verses is found all for which prophecy is given and what it normally does. The verses have three parts:
(1) the prophecy itself, (2) the explanation of why the prophecy is given, and (3) an encouragement lest those who heard the prophecy should be discouraged by it.

The Prophecy

The prophecy concerning Judas is given to qualify what had been said a bit earlier. Several verses before this, after Jesus had told Peter, "And you are clean," he hastened to add, "though not every one of you." In this section, having spoken of the man who can be happy through knowing and obeying Christ's commandments, Jesus in a similar way qualifies his remark by adding that he does not speak of each one. His actual words are, "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me'" (v. 18). The quotation is from Psalm 41:9.

"Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."

Nothing in this psalm identifies the person about whom the author, David, was speaking. But it seems most likely that he was referring to Ahithophel, his most faithful counselor, who nevertheless sided with Absalom at the time of Absalom's rebellion. It is a tragic story as it unfolds in 2 Samuel 15-17. The revolt of Absalom had caught David unaware, and he and his mighty men had been forced to flee from Jerusalem. Ahithophel remained behind. When David heard that Ahithophel was with Absalom, David was greatly concerned, for Ahithophel gave wise counsel. David prayed, "O LORD, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness" (2 Sam. 15:31). God answered David's prayer, not by causing Ahithophel to give bad counsel to Absalom, for Ahithophel continued to speak wisely, but by causing his good counsel to be disregarded. The story concludes by saying, "When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He put his house in order, and then hanged himself. So he died and was buried in his father's sepulcher" (2 Sam. 17:23).

The fact that Ahithophel hanged himself is excellent evidence that it is probably to him that Christ (and therefore also David) is referring in the forty-first psalm, for Judas also went and hanged himself. But the point of the story is not in Ahithophel's or Judas's end but in the fact that one who had been close to Jesus would betray him. Ahithophel had eaten at David's own table.

So had Judas eaten with Jesus. Ahithophel had betrayed David. So Judas would betray the Lord of glory.

In his commentary, William Barclay stresses the sheer cruelty of Judas's betrayal, noting that "in the east to eat bread with a person was a sign of friendship and an act of loyalty. Second Samuel 9:7, 13 tell how David granted it to Mephibosheth to eat bread at his table, when he might well have eliminated him as a descendant of Saul. First Kings 18:19 tells how the prophets of Baal ate bread at the table of Jezebel. For one who

had eaten bread at someone's table to turn against the person to whom by that very act he had pledged his friendship was a bitter thing. This disloyalty of friends is for the Psalmist the sorest of all hurts. 'For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it; neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company'

(Ps. 55:12-14)."

Jesus was prophesying that one who had been with him for the entire three years of his earthly ministry would betray him, and that is sobering. It is sobering because we reason that if one could have been among the company of the Twelve for all those years, during which time he not only heard the Lord Jesus Christ but also witnessed the miracles he did, if one who had experienced all that could betray him, then it is certainly possible for a person to be in the company of God's people today, in a context in which the Word of God is faithfully preached, and yet not actually be a child of God.

We should stop at that point and ask the question: Am I really a child of God or am I just in the company of God's people? If the latter is true of you, if you are just in the company of Christians, then this passage should have a special urgency for you, and you should not rest until you have actually come to believe in him whom to know is life eternal.

Faith in Himself

In the second of these three verses the Lord gives the reason for his prophecy. It is, he says, "that when it does happen you may believe that I am he" (v. 19). The prophecy is given so that the fulfillment, when it comes to pass, might be received as evidence that Jesus really is who he claims to be—the unique Son of God, Jehovah.

I am impressed with the fact that in the Old Testament, particularly in Isaiah, this is the primary reason offered for the giving of prophecy. We usually think of prophecy being given to satisfy our curiosity or, at the

very least, being given to warn us and allow us to prepare for what is coming. But the reason the Bible gives is that, when the prophecy comes to pass, we might know that God, who gives the prophecy, is the true God, for only he can see the future and guarantee its outcome. This is clear in the central chapters of Isaiah, for instance. In chapter 40, which begins this discussion, God contrasts himself with the idols of the pagans who, he says, cannot even stand upright by themselves, let alone move about. "To whom, then, will you compare God?" he asks. "What image will you compare him to? As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple" (vv. 18-20).

Then, in chapter 41, the argument continues. "'Present your case,' says the Lord. 'Set forth your arguments,' says Jacob's King. 'Bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us things to come, tell us what the future holds that we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear. But you are of nothing and your works are utterly worthless; he who chooses you is detestable'" (vv. 2124).

By contrast God can tell the future and therefore should be believed. "I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass" (Isa. 48:3).

This is the same argument employed by the Lord Jesus when he says, "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you may believe that I am he."Just as God argues in the Book of Isaiah, so also does Christ argue in John 13. And the conclusion is the same. Jehovah is the true God. Jesus is the true God. Jesus is Jehovah. Jesus argues that he is not just a spokesman for God, though he is that also. He argues that he is God. Whatever he has prophesied he brings to pass.

Faith in the Scriptures

The clearest reason why Christ gives the prophecy concerning Judas is that the disciples might find their faith in him strengthened. But as we read this in the context of the quotation from Psalm 41, we can hardly miss the truth that the same knowledge will also strengthen faith in the Scriptures. How? By showing us that they, no less than the Lord himself, may be trusted. Why? Because, like the Lord himself, they are eternal. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matt. 24:35). Or again, "Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18). The fulfillment of prophecy helps us to believe this and to alter our lives accordingly.

Why do we cherish the Scriptures? Why do we memorize them? It is because these words, having come to us from God and therefore also bearing his nature, are eternal and so will not pass away. Everything else that we know will pass away, sometimes well within our lifetimes. The ideas and viewpoints that your children are being taught today in grade school will be changed before they reach high school. What they are taught in high school will be altered by college. College outlooks will change by the time the young man or woman enters his or her profession. Even then professions change so quickly that unless the person reads to keep up he or she will soon be behind in the field. Nothing we learn is permanent, nothing we see is eternal— except the Scriptures! They *are* permanent; they are absolutely trustworthy. That is why we memorize them and teach them to our children.

If you are a parent, have you ever thought that there is nothing you can leave your children that will not pass away in time except the truths found in this Book? Some parents think they have served their children well if they have left money to them. But money can disappear overnight. Sometimes the children even reject it. Other parents think their legacy to their children will be a fine education or, perhaps, their own values. But these change also, and even education is not valued as

highly by many as it was formerly. Only the Word of God remains valuable and without change.

Do not be foolish enough to neglect this Book when you are trying to give your children the best. Do not neglect it yourself when you are sorting out your priorities.

In his youth John Newton had been brought up in a Christian home in England. But his parents died when he was only six years old, and he was sent to live with an unbelieving relative. In the relative's home he suffered great abuse. At last, to escape this ill treatment, Newton ran away to sea, as boys often did in those days, and joined the navy. Unfortunately, he fell into gross sin and eventually abandoned the navy and fled to Africa. In Africa sin gained a terrible hold on him, and he sank to utter degradation and misery. At last he left Africa and got on a ship going back to England. On the return journey the ship ran into a terrible storm, and Newton, who was part of the ship's crew, was sent down into the hold of the ship to pump water. Newton was terrified. The ship seemed to be sinking, and he knew that, if it sank, he would most certainly go down with it. For days and nights he pumped, thinking himself to be abandoned both by God and man. But as he pumped water out of that hold and began to cry to God to save him, verses that he had learned in the home of his parents before he was six years old came back to his memory. The Holy Spirit showed him what those verses meant. He believed on Christ, and was born again. Later, when the storm had passed and he was again safe in England, he went on to become a highly gifted preacher and teacher of the Word of God.

What had happened? The Word of the living God had remained with him and had become the vehicle by which the Holy Spirit brought forth new life.

I would like to insert one more word here for parents. It concerns two great principles for communicating the Bible's content. First, the Word must be communicated a bit at a time, so that what is learned at one time may be added to and built upon in later lessons. Isaiah expresses it best when he writes, "For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule

on rule, a little here, a little there" (28:10). In other words, do not think that you have taught your child or even yourself when you have been to church just once or even a dozen times, or when you have read the Bible just once. Learning is a lifetime process. So you must keep at it. It must be a precept here and a precept there, here a little and there a little.

Second, you must memorize the Bible. We have a great resistance to memorizing anything today, but David tells us what is needed when he declares, "I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Ps. 119:11). It is the memorized word that stays with us and is available when we need it.

An Encouragement

We come finally to the third of these verses. It is a verse of encouragement. It says, "I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me" (v. 20). When we first read that verse it seems disconnected from what has gone before, but a little thought soon shows the connection. In the previous verses Jesus had been encouraging his disciples to follow the example he had given them through the foot washing, but as he had done that he had begun to speak of Judas and of the fact that he would betray him. Were they discouraged at this point? We do not know. But if they were, we could certainly have understood their dismay. They may have thought that if these things were so, then none of them would ever be capable of serving the Lord. They would have thought that they were all a total loss and that any possibility of future usefulness to Jesus was ended.

But this was not so. One would betray him. Yet in spite of this, Jesus had chosen them, the others, to be his representatives in an ungodly world. And they would *be* his representatives, so much so that whoever received them would be accounted as having received Jesus, and whoever received Jesus would receive God.

This is a great encouragement, for ourselves as well as for the first apostles. There is much to discourage us in the Christian life. There

really are betrayals. We see it within our churches. We see it in our seminaries, in professors who deny the God who bought them. "But," says Jesus, "I know that. It is not new. It has always been that way. Nevertheless, in the midst of betrayals I still have my ambassadors, whom I will use and who will be a blessing." We are such ambassadors, if we believe on Jesus and speak for him as we are instructed to do.

Chapter 169.
Journey into Night

John 13:21-30

In a book that is in some sense an autobiography, Eugene O'Neill writes of his *Long Day's Journey into Night.* It is a story of increasing despair and darkness. The same title may be chosen for the incident recorded in John 13:21-30, for these verses record the departure of Judas from the company of him who is the light of the world so that he could go out into eternal darkness. The passage begins with the announcement of the traitor: "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." It ends with the somber sentence: "And it was night."

These verses may also be introduced by pointing out that within them the Lord Jesus Christ performs the second symbolic action of this chapter. The first was the foot washing in which he vividly illustrated the nature of his ministry and admonished those who followed him to assume a servant role. That action was visible to all the disciples and was remembered with clarity, as the great number of references to that event, both direct and indirect, throughout the New Testament, would indicate. The second symbolic action, the one recorded in these verses, was the giving of the bread to Judas, by which he was identified as the traitor. Unlike the foot washing, this act was not made clear to everyone. True, they all saw it, but the nature of the act was such that only John and possibly Peter understood it, and even they did not realize the betrayal was imminent. The incident ends when Judas,

leaving the little band, goes to carry out his betrayal, an action that would eventually end in the deaths of both himself and his master.

There are three parts to this section. First, there is the announcement of the betrayer. Second, there is a contrast between Judas, who was reclining on one side of the Lord, and John, who was reclining on the other side. Finally, there is a disclosure of Judas's fate.

A Troubling Announcement

"After he said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, 'I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me.' His disciples stared at one another at a loss to know which of them he meant."

These verses tell us that Jesus was deeply disturbed. Sometimes, as we look upon Christ in his deity and forget his humanity, we assume that he was unbothered by the things that bother us. We assume that he had resources that we do not have and, therefore, was above life and untroubled by it. But this is not the teaching of the Word of God. The teaching of Scripture is that he was "tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15). So if we know discouragement, we may know that he knew discouragement. If we know distress, we may know that he knew distress. If we know sorrow, we may know that he knew sorrow. Here in the upper room, during the last hours he had to spend with his disciples before his crucifixion, Jesus was increasingly troubled by all that was coming.

We know that by the time the Lord got to Gethsemane he was troubled, so much so, we are told, that he sweat as it were great drops of blood. He was troubled by the fact that he was about to go to the cross and would be separated from the Father as a judicial punishment for our sins. Here he was undoubtedly also troubled by the thought of the impending betrayal and of the one who would prove traitorous, one who had lived with him in the closest communion for three years. Yet at the end of that time was willing to sell his master for the price of a slave.

Three Lessons

There are great lessons in the fact that Judas was among the disciples and yet was not a bornagain man.

First, the situation teaches us that *fallen man needs more than an example* if he is to be saved. What better example could Judas have had than the Lord Jesus Christ? Jesus had chosen Judas three years earlier. Judas had been in the company of the Twelve and had been instructed by Jesus. He had heard the Beatitudes. He had heard the Sermon on the Mount and the parables. Judas had heard all the other teachings. Indeed, he had been given on-the-field experience, because when the Twelve and the seventy were sent out, Judas was undoubtedly among them. Besides all that, Judas had seen a perfect example of all the Lord was teaching during the threeyear ministry. When the Lord said, "Blessed are the meek," Judas saw perfect meekness in him. When Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers," he saw the perfect peacemaker. When the Lord said, "Be holy as your Father in heaven is holy," he saw that holiness. Above all, Jesus was filled with the love of God. Judas saw all that, and yet was unsaved.

That is why we must pray and ask the Holy Spirit to do the work of regeneration in the lives of men and women. Examples are not enough. Even the example of the Lord Jesus Christ is not enough. If we think that men and women are going to be converted by the way we live, we are going to be disappointed. If we think that they are going to be converted even by bringing them into our congregations and exposing them to the teachings of Scripture and allowing them to see who Jesus Christ is and what he did, we are going to be disappointed. That is not enough. What is required is regeneration, and that is the work by which the Holy Spirit brings forth new life in the heart of an individual so that these things become real to him and he becomes able to respond to the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

There is a second lesson in the presence of Judas among the Twelve: *the difficulty of discerning God's elect.* We who stand in the Reformed tradition and make a great deal of God's election sometimes have errors of our own. And one of the errors is to imagine that we can determine those who are elect and those who are not. That is false. We cannot.

Scripture tells us that people look on the outward appearance but that God (and only God) looks on the heart. Moreover, because the outward appearance of an unbeliever can be much like that of a believer, we are forever mixing up the two. We tend to see someone who does something that we do not like and that we think is unspiritual, and we say to ourselves, "Well, that one is certainly not saved." On the other hand, we see someone who measures up to our particular standards of morality, and we say, "He is a Christian." That is not necessarily so. Appearances are important, but they are not incontestable evidence of the presence or absence of the divine life. If we need an illustration by which we can measure the difficulty of discerning the elect, we need only turn to Judas and recognize that here in the Twelve was one who had lived with the other disciples for three years and yet was totally unknown to them in his true character.

I suppose that this says something about Judas too. Judas, I am convinced, was not just a mistaken individual. He was a deceiver, a devil, a hypocrite *par excellence*. Judas lived with the others and pretended that he was one with them, while deep in his heart he was rebelling against everything that Jesus Christ taught; and in the end he would betray him. Judas was certainly a hypocrite. But the point is that the disciples were unaware of this. Moreover, even when the Lord pointed out that one of their number would betray him, not one of them understood who this one was until Jesus revealed the matter to John.

Once Jesus told the story of a farmer who planted a field of wheat and of an enemy who sowed weeds among the wheat. After the enemy had sowed his weeds, the servants, who knew about it, came to their master to ask what to do. "Shall we root up the weeds and get rid of the enemy's work?" they asked. The master replied, "No, because in doing that you tear up the wheat also. Let them grow up together. In the end we will harvest the entire field, collect the wheat, and then cast the weeds into the fire where they will be burned."

As we apply that story to the church in our age, we recognize at once that it teaches that since (1) some of God's people are so much like weeds and (2) some of the devil's people are so much like wheat, we

cannot tell the difference between them. So in essence Jesus says, "Do not worry too much about having a pure church. Be as pure in doctrine as you can, but do not worry too much about weeding out all unbelievers. "Because," he says, "if you do, I am afraid you are going to lose some of my people doing it." We cannot discern the elect, and it is good that we cannot. We must leave that in the hands of the Lord.

There is a third lesson here also. It is the *patience of the Lord Jesus Christ.* Have you ever thought what marvelous patience the Lord had in order to tolerate Judas? He knew that the Scriptures said that one of the Twelve would betray him. He knew that Judas was that one. Yet throughout the years of his ministry, so far as we can tell, not only was Jesus patient with Judas, he was so patient that not one of the disciples ever detected any telltale differences in Jesus' dealings with him that might cause them to be suspicious of him. That is the marvelous grace, the patience of our Lord. You say, "But that is beyond anything we see on earth." That is true; it is. Yet that same patience of the Lord Jesus Christ extends to all who are truly his, as he sees us disobey him, persist in our own way, and offend him constantly in thought, word, and deed.

John and Judas

The second part of the story has to do with the contrast between John and Judas. "One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, 'Ask him which one he meant.' Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, 'Lord, who is it?' Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I will give this bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' Then dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon."

As I reconstruct the seating arrangement in the upper room, it seems to me (indeed, it has seemed this way to most commentators) that John must have been on Jesus' right side and that Judas must have been on Jesus' left. They did not sit around a table the way we do today, the way Leonardo da Vinci showed it in that great painting of the Last Supper that hangs in Milan, Italy. They reclined, usually on their left side so that their right arm would be free to feed themselves. This meant that

each man would have his head against the chest of the man to his left. John, on the right side of Christ, simply leaned back to ask his question. Jesus reached around to his left to give the bread to Judas.

So Judas was on one side of Jesus. John was on the other. Both were near Jesus, but John was close to his heart.

Who would you rather be? Notice that John was in a good place to ask questions. When you are close to the heart of the Lord you can always ask questions. In fact, that is the best place in the world to ask questions. We are not always so close to the Lord, however. Sometimes we are farther away. Sometimes we are very far away. Moreover, the thing that keeps us away is our sin, because sin is an offense to the Lord, and we sense it, even in our sinful state. So we turn our backs to him; we move away; we try to get out of his visual range. Then either we catch the gaze of Christ, confess our sin, and return to the place of blessing, or we go determinedly on in our sin and suffer the inevitable results.

To be near the heart of the Lord is the best place in the world to ask questions. But notice also that it is the best place to get answers. Some answers we always have. The Bible gives them. But there are other answers that are not given publicly, some that the Lord will not shout. For these we must be close to him. Such answers are heard only as we look up into his face, as we see it reflected in his Word, and hear the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit as he whispers to us.

And It Was Night

We miss the importance of this event unless we recognize that Jesus was honoring Judas until the end. The seat at the Lord's left was the place of honor, and this was where Judas was. As the disciples went into the upper room, we know that they were disputing about who should have the highest place (Luke 22:24). In those circumstances the Lord must have said, 'Judas, I would like you to sit next to me this evening. I would like you to be here where you and I can converse." We are not told what the Lord said to Judas, but I cannot imagine that they

went through the entire meal without the Lord speaking graciously to him, showing his love in every gesture and in every inflection of his voice. Furthermore, the giving of the bread was an honor, and to receive it was to make a pledge of loyalty. So at this point in the meal, in spite of the fact that Jesus had both loved and honored him, Judas hardened his heart and received the bread, saying in effect, "Thank you, Master. I am yours." He lied. He played a role.

Jesus, who knew it, said to him, "What you are about to do, do quickly." At this, Judas understood, I suppose, that he was found out. He left immediately, and, John concludes by noting, "It was night."

Light and darkness are important symbols in this narrative. In the earliest verses of the Gospel, John, speaking of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, says, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men." Then, in the eighth and ninth chapters, Jesus is quoted as saying, "I am the light of the world." We know, as we turn to the other Gospel accounts of the crucifixion, that during the time Jesus was on the cross, darkness came over the land from noontime to about three in the afternoon. Each reference makes the point obvious: Jesus is the light. So the converse is that to leave Christ's presence is to go into darkness; and not just the darkness of a physical night either but spiritual darkness, which means death and damnation.

There were times when the disciples were to go through dark hours. The Lord was going to be crucified. When that occurred, they were going to feel forsaken and would begin to scatter. He who had been the center of their life was to be taken from them. But their darkness, however deep, was not to be compared with the darkness that engulfed Judas Iscariot. They knew darkness; yet he lived who was their light. The resurrection was coming, and in his presence they were once more to see light. But Judas? Judas went his own way. He turned from Christ and so found that darkness that endures forever.

Jesus is lovely. Jesus is holiness, love, truth, grace, patience, mercy, peace, and everything else good that we could ever imagine. Indeed, not only is he all of these qualities in himself; he is the source of them for

all believers. How foolish it is, then, to turn from him to that which is the absence of these good things! God grant that our hearts may be made right before him and that the Holy Spirit, who applies these truths, may make the Lord Jesus Christ central in all that we do and say.

Chapter 170.
Christ Glorified Now

John 13:31-32

When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once."

Have you ever been in a place where a number of friends were gathered, all of whom wanted to discuss something that was important to them but who were unable to because someone who was not really with them in spirit was present? If you have, it may also be that you have noticed what happened when the unsympathetic person finally left the group. At once the conversation brightened up, and comments that had been bottled up came flowing forth naturally.

That was the situation in the upper room on the last night Jesus spent with his disciples before his crucifixion. Here were friends, all of them quite close. They had spent the last three years in one another's company. But in their midst was one who was not really with them in spirit: Judas. True, Judas was not known in his true character to the apostles. But Jesus knew his nature and understood clearly what it was that he was about to do. Judas was about to betray Jesus to his enemies. So, as long as Judas was there, Jesus was somewhat constrained in what he could say to the gathering. He acted in order to get their attention, once in the foot washing and once more in the giving of the bread to Judas, but he seems to have held back in his teaching until the traitor's departure. Suddenly Judas is gone, however, and at once the atmosphere is cleared. Now Jesus is perfectly free to speak and the disciples to

listen. At this point, then, Jesus begins to speak of his coming glory, the new commandment, heaven, and the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit on his followers.

The text says, "When he was gone, Jesus said, 'Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify him in himself, and will glorify him at once'" (vv. 31-32).

Layers of Glory

It is interesting that the theme of the glorification of Christ (and therefore also of God the Father) comes first in this series of heart revelations. And it is interesting, too, with what intensity Jesus speaks of such glorification. The word itself (either "glorified" or "glorify") occurs five times in just these two verses, and a careful analysis will show that it has three distinct references and two meanings.

The two meanings correspond to the two major uses of the important Greek word *doxa*. *Doxa* (meaning "glory") is related to the ancient verb *dokeo*, which in the early days of the Greek language meant "to seem" or "to appear," and then later "to hold an opinion of" someone or something. In time the sense of the word changed to that of holding only a *good* opinion about someone, and at that point, the noun, which originally meant only "an opinion," came to mean "a good opinion" and consequently either "praise" or "honor." All these ideas are important in the biblical vocabulary. For to have a right opinion of God is to be "orthodox" (orthodox means "a right opinion"), and to ascribe right opinions to God is to praise or worship him. This can be put in a slightly different form by saying that God's glory consists of his intrinsic worth embodied in his character, and that the acknowledgment of this worth by those who are his people is worship.

There is also a meaning of the word "glory" which is largely external. This is the sense of glory which is associated with light. We have it, for instance, in every Old Testament reference in which God is described as dwelling in glory unapproachable. Such glory was veiled by the cloud that covered Mount Sinai, where God came down to talk to Moses and,

as the result of which, Moses' face glowed with a transferred brilliance. The same idea is present at the transfiguration of Christ on the mountain in Palestine. In each of these events, glory is the outward brilliance appropriate to, and normally accompanying, a revelation of God.

These distinctions are necessary for understanding the verses before us, for wherever the present tense is used we must understand Jesus to be using the word in the first sense; that is, as a revelation of his own (or the Father's) true worth or character. In this case the reference is to the revelation of God's character through the crucifixion. Whenever the future tense is used, we must understand Jesus to be using the word in the second sense; that is, as a reference to that future glory that Christ received as a result of his resurrection and subsequent ascension into heaven.

Glory in Christ's Passion

The first reference to glory in these verses is in the present tense: "Now is the Son of Man glorified." When did the Lord say, "Now is the Son of Man glorified"? The answer is that he said it in the upper room while looking forward to his crucifixion, immediately after that event was set in motion by the departure of Judas. Jesus had said to Judas, "What you are about to do, do quickly. "Judas left to arrange for the betrayal of his Lord. Jesus, knowing that the final act of the drama was now underway, turned to his disciples, and said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified."

How is this so? How can the crucifixion be glorification? The answer is in what the crucifixion means.

First, although we may not think so and the world as a whole cannot understand so at all, the crucifixion is undoubtedly *the central and most significant point of world history.* Nothing that has happened in the world's history from the beginning of creation until now, or will ever happen before that day when all things will be wrapped up in Christ, is as significant as the crucifixion. Here that great drama, which God had planned from before the foundation of the world, was brought to its

focal point and acted out. Men of all races, social status, and levels of understanding have been saved by it.

There is another way in which the cross is Christ's glory. At the cross, he *reversed the conduct of the first Adam* and thus turned the history of our race around. Paul works this out in detail in the fifth chapter of Romans, pointing out that "as the result of one [Adam's] trespass was condemnation to all men, even so also the result of one act of righteousness [Jesus'] was justification that brings life for all men" (Rom. 5:18). When Adam decided to disobey God, it was as if he fell over a cliff carrying the whole string of his descendants with him. Imagine a group of mountain climbers working their way up the side of a mountain. They are all roped together, and Adam is in the lead. Adam loses his footing and falls. Because of the rope, every one of the climbers is pulled over the edge of the cliff after Adam. The whole race follows him.

But there, at the end of the line, is the Lord Jesus Christ; and he stands fast. Because the Lord Jesus Christ does not succumb to temptation, because the Lord does not sin, because he is therefore able to offer himself up as the perfect sacrifice for human sin, and does so, he becomes the only stable and safe point of humanity. Consequently, those who are united to him by faith are saved by him. The fall of Adam, which led to destruction, is reversed in Jesus Christ. By his atonement, Jesus leads those who are his own to safety.

Finally, we find in Hebrews 2:14 that the death of the Lord Jesus Christ also *reversed the power of Satan* and so brought to an end the power of that wicked one. In this, Christ is glorified. "Since the children have flesh and blood, he shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil." The "sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law," Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:56. But the Lord Jesus Christ provided an atonement for sin and thus broke the power of sin over those who are his own people.

God Glorified

The second reference to glory in this verse is also in the present tense, for the verse goes on to say that *God* is glorified in Jesus Christ. This is also significant, because once again Jesus is talking of the crucifixion. How is God glorified in Christ's crucifixion?

First, the *justice* of God is revealed. Paul works this out in Romans 3:26, where he says that through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ God proved himself to be "just, and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." The argument goes something like this. Paul is acknowledging that throughout the entire Old Testament period those who looked forward to the coming of a redeemer were saved by God. That is, Abraham was a saved man; Isaac was a saved man; Jacob was a saved man. But the question could have been raised at that period, "How is God just in saving them?" He offers them forgiveness, that is true. He saves them from the penalty of their sin. But what of the sin? Where is it punished? God justified these men, but he does not seem to have been just in doing so. "But he was," says Paul. "He justified them on the basis of the death of Christ, which was still future." Consequently, when Christ died on the cross, sin was punished in him and God was seen to be just in his previous acts of forgiveness. At the Cross the justice of God in forgiving sinners was revealed, as it were, for the first time. Now people can look to the cross and say, "God is not only the One who justifies the ungodly; God is also the One who is just in so doing." So God is glorified in his justice through what Christ has done.

Second, God's *holiness* is revealed. On this point Arthur W. Pink writes wisely. "He is 'of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity' (Hab. 1:13), and when Christ was 'made a curse for us' (Gal. 3:13) the thrice Holy One turned away from Him. It was this which caused the agonizing Saviour to cry, 'My God, My God, why hast thou *forsaken* me?' Never did God so manifest His hatred of sin as in the sufferings and death of His Only-begotten. There He showed it was impossible for Him to be at peace with that which had raised its defiant head against Him. All the honour due to the holiness of God by all the holy angels, and all the cheerful obedience and patient suffering of all

the holy men who have ever existed, or ever will exist, are nothing in comparison with the offering of Christ Himself in order that every demand of God's holiness, which sin had outraged, might be fully met."

There is a third way in which God is glorified at Calvary. *The faithfulness* of God is revealed there. In the Old Testament period we find God promising a deliverer. Adam and Eve are in the Garden. They have sinned. They have eaten of the fruit of the forbidden tree. When God comes to them in the Garden they hide from his presence. They are sinful; God is holy; and they cannot stand the sight of his holiness. The Lord asks, "What have you done?" and the whole story comes out. But God provides for them. He kills animals, clothing them with their skins. Then, in promised blessing, he points to the future and says, "The day is coming when the seed of the woman will rise and crush the head of the serpent." Genesis 3:15 contains this promise of a redeemer. But Adam and Eve died, and the Savior had not yet come.

Farther on in the Old Testament we find God appearing to Abraham. God says, "Abraham, I am going to bless you and all the nations through you. I am going to do it through your seed." Abraham believes that. He believes that at one particular time an individual will come who would be the world's Savior. Yet Abraham lived to an old age and died, and Jesus had not come.

We turn to the prophets and we find God speaking through them. We find him telling Isaiah that One is coming who would be "pierced for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities." The "punishment that brought us peace" would be on him (Isa. 53:5). We find God telling Micah that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judah (Mic. 5:2). He declares through Malachi that the Savior will come as "the sun of righteousness" risen with "healing in his wings" (Mal. 4:2). He says that this One will be preceded by a forerunner, who will appear like the prophet Elijah (Mal. 3:1-3; 4:5-6). God gave the prophets these and many other promises. Yet they all died, and the Savior had not come.

Had God forgotten his promises? Are God's people destitute of hope? Is God unfaithful? One day an angel appears to a virgin in Nazareth and

announces that the Messiah is to be born at last. To Joseph he says, 'You are to give him the name Jesus; because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Thus the Lord Jesus Christ enters the world, goes through his ministry, proceeds to the cross, and there dies to accomplish the defeat of Satan that was promised back in the earliest pages of the Old Testament and reiterated many times thereafter. God is shown to be faithful, and he is glorified in that.

Finally, God's *love* is also revealed at Calvary. Nothing in all history reveals God's love as does the cross of Jesus Christ. In fact, so great is this revelation of his love that God appeals to it as proof of his love. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." How do we know that God loves us? We know that God loves us because the Lord Jesus Christ gave his life to redeem us from sin. In this is God glorified.

O when we view God's grand design, To save rebellious worms,
How vengeance and compassion join In their sublimest forms.
Our thoughts are lost in rev'rent awe— We love and we adore;
The first archangel never saw So much of God before!
Here each Divine perfection joins, And thought can never trace,
Which of the glories brightest shines— The justice or the grace.

The Coming Glory

At this point of our study we might well wish to stop. But we cannot stop quite yet, for Christ's words go on to speak of glory one last time, on this occasion in the future tense. He says, "If God is glorified in him [at the cross], God will glorify him in himself, and will glorify him at once." This means that if God is glorified by the special nature of Christ's death, as he is, then he will immediately proceed to place a new and special glory upon Christ through his resurrection, exaltation, and ascension to power at the Father's right hand.

I think the Lord must have yearned for it all to be completed at this point. He was willing to go to the cross. He embraced it gladly because it meant our salvation. But he looked beyond the cross to that day when the Resurrection would take place and the power of the cross would be evident, to that moment when he would ascend once again to his Father and would there minister for us as our great high priest, having presented the blood of his sacrifice as the atonement for our sin (see Heb. 9:11-14).

If Christ is glorified now, as he is, and if he is going to return one day in glory, I wonder how you will respond to him when you see him in his splendor. Will you look upon him as One whom you have spurned? Will you see him as One whom you said had no bearing upon your life, no word for your situation, One whose death means absolutely nothing and whose glorification is meaningless? Or will you receive him as One whose death means everything to you and whom you have sought to glorify by your obedience? I trust that it will be the latter—it should be—and that you will indeed serve him until your life's end.

Chapter 171.
The New Commandment

John 13:33-34

"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you

cannot come.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

The Gospel of John has been given many fine titles in the long history of its exposition, but none are more fitting than those that identify it as the Gospel of God's love. It has been called "God's love letter to the world." But if this is so, then it is probably also true that either John 3:16 or the verses to which we come now are its heart. They are those in which the Lord Jesus Christ speaks to his disciples out of his great love for them, reminding them of that love and encouraging them to love one another.

The Preface

Verse 34 is the key verse of this section, but it is nevertheless significant that it is preceded by another that is, in some sense, its preface. The preface says, "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come" (v. 33). As I read the various commentators on this Gospel I find a discussion of why the disciples could not follow Christ and of the difference between their inability and the inability of the Jews. (The same words were spoken to the Jewish leaders earlier.) But I do not find an explanation of the connection between this verse and the great verse following. Yet it is in this connection that the importance of the verse lies.

What is its significance? It is along two lines. First, it is evident that since the Lord Jesus Christ was about to depart from the world, the only example of true love that the world had ever known was about to be taken from it. Jesus was himself love, for he was God and "God is love" (1 John 4:8). He was about to prove that love by dying on the cross. Yet in the very act of dying, which was to be followed by his resurrection and ascension into heaven, he was to be taken from humanity. How, then, were men and women to know what true divine love is? How were they to see love demonstrated when he was about to be taken from

them? The answer is that they were to see it in those who are Christ's disciples. Jesus is being taken, but now the disciples are to love as he loved. It is as if Jesus had said, "I am going; therefore you must be as I have been in this world."

The second way in which the preface is important is in its transference of the love the disciples felt for him to one another. There is no doubt that each of the disciples (Judas excluded, who by now, however, had left the upper room) loved Jesus. Whatever he said they would do. Several had just prepared the upper room for this last dinner. Peter is about to say that he will die for Jesus if necessary. It is true, of course, that their love was not as strong as they thought it was. Peter would not die; in fact, he would deny his Master. The others would scatter at the moment of the arrest in Gethsemane. Nevertheless, they did truly love him. And yet, just as certainly as they loved him, so is it certain that they did not really love one another with anything even approaching that intensity. On the contrary, they were actually jealous of one another. They were disputing over who should be greatest. They would not wash the others' feet. In this situation Jesus, who is about to be taken from them, points out that now it is precisely one another whom they must love.

The vertical love of disciples for the exalted Christ must be expressed horizontally in their love for all other Christians. Moreover, the horizontal love, which can be seen by everyone, is proof of the vertical dimension.

Things New and Old

In the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, in a section of Christ's teachings dealing with the kingdom of God, Jesus speaks of a teacher of the law being like an "owner of a house, who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old" (v. 52). At this point he is himself like that teacher, for he follows his preface by the giving of a command that is at once both new and ancient.

The command to love is old in that it existed before Christ's coming. In its simplest and bestknown form it is found in Leviticus 19:18, which says, "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD." This is the verse to which Jesus referred when he was asked his opinion concerning the first and greatest commandment. He said that the greatest commandment was that recorded in Deuteronomy 6:5— "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." The second was Leviticus 19:18.

But if the commandment was an old commandment, as it must have been if it is recorded in one of the first five books of the Old Testament, in what sense is it new? Indeed, how can Christ call it "a new command"? The answer is that it was raised to an entirely new level and given an entirely new significance by Jesus. We can say that it is given a *new object;* it is to be exercised according to a *new measure;* it is to be made possible by a *new power.* Each of these is involved in Christ's saying.

In the first place, the command to love received a *new object.* It is true that the verse from
Leviticus declares that the Jew is to love his neighbor as himself. But the neighbor involved is a Jewish neighbor only. The first half of the verse makes this plain, for in a parallel sentence the reader is told that he is not to hold a grudge against any of "your [also his] people." This is a physical, family relationship. In Christ's command, by contrast, the relationship is spiritual, for the neighbor is any believer in Jesus.

Something else about this new object is very important. Jesus says that the disciples are to love one another and that this is to be a witness to the unbelieving world. However, it is obvious from Christ's own example and from his teaching elsewhere that this is not to be a love that is held back from unbelievers. Even the very nature of the relationship makes this clear, for if the relationship involved is spiritual, then obviously there is no way of knowing who might be included in the company of believers should God so move. When the relationship

was physical, the limits were obvious. One was supposed to love other Jews. Gentiles were not to be loved. They were sinners, those whom God obviously wished to destroy. But when the relationship became spiritual, the whole matter was broadened. This spiritual, Christian brotherhood is created by God's drawing together those of all races and languages. Consequently, the Christian is to love every individual—everyone; for anyone can be a special one for whom Christ died.

Alexander Maclaren, that great preacher of another generation, speaks of the newness of such love as it battered the ancient world's societies. "When the words were spoken, the then-known civilized Western world was cleft by great, deep gulfs of separation, like the crevasses in a glacier.... Language, religion, national animosities, differences of condition, and saddest of all, differences of sex, split the world up into alien fragments. A 'stranger' and an 'enemy' were expressed in one language by the same word. The learned and the unlearned, the slave and his master, the barbarian and the Greek, the man and the woman, stood on opposite sides of the gulfs, flinging hostility across. A Jewish peasant wandered up and down for three years in His own little country, which was the very focus of narrowness and separation and hostility, as the Roman historian felt when He called the Jews the 'haters of the human race'; He gathered a few disciples, and He was crucified by a contemptuous Roman governor, who thought that the life of one fanatical Jew was a small price to pay for popularity with his troublesome subjects, and in a generation after, the clefts were being bridged and all over the Empire a strange new sense of unity was bearing breathed, and 'Barbarian, Scythian, bond and free,' male and female, Jew and Greek, learned and ignorant, clasped hands and sat down at one table, and felt themselves 'all one in Christ Jesus.'"

The commandment of Christ does not only have a new object. It also is to be exercised according to a *new measure*. What was love before this, after all? A vague feeling of good will? A sense of pride in one's race? A need to defend a neighbor or to free a family member who had become a slave? Yes, this and perhaps a bit more. But it was not that measure of love seen in the fact that the God of the universe would take

human form, suffer, and die for those who were ungodly in order that, almost in spite of themselves those who hated God and had tried to turn from him might be redeemed from the chains of sin and brought into glory. "This is love," writes John in the fourth chapter of his magnificent first letter, "not that we loved God [because we did not], but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (v. 10).

The measure of this love is the standard found in 1 Corinthians 13. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always perseveres. Love never fails" (vv. 4-8). This is the love Jesus brought, and it was a new thing in this world.

Third, the command to love is also new in that it is made possible by a *new power.* The power is the power of the Holy Spirit, the very life of the Lord Jesus Christ in each believer. How much we need this! Without it we cannot love as Christ loved; for such love cannot be achieved by human energy.

Our Great Example

There is one more point to be seen in these two verses: Jesus is himself our example as we obey his command. He indicates this in the second half of verse 34, in which he says, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." It is not just that we are to love. It is that we are to love *as he loved us.* His love is to be the full measure of our love for one another.

How can we speak about this practically? One way is to return to the verses from 1 Corinthians cited earlier. When they were quoted before they were quoted exactly as they are printed in our Bibles. This time read them with the word 'Jesus" substituted for the word "love." 'Jesus is patient, Jesus is kind. He does not envy, he does not boast, he is not proud. He is not rude, he is not self-seeking, he is not easily angered, he

keeps no record of wrongs. Jesus does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. He always protects, always trusts, always perseveres. Jesus never fails." Clearly, the substitution of 'Jesus" for "love" is quite proper, for Jesus is obviously the embodiment of such love. Our hearts acknowledge it to be so, and we rejoice in the fact.

Now make another substitution. We are told in our text that we are to love as Christ loves. But since 1 Corinthians 13 reveals the way that Christ did love, we (if we love in that way) should be able to substitute our name for his. We should be able to put "I" where "love" is printed. "I am patient, I am kind. I do not envy, I do not boast, I am not proud. I am not rude, I am not selfseeking, I am not easily angered, I keep no record of wrongs. I do not delight in evil, but rejoice with the truth. I always protect, always trust, always persevere. I never fail." When we read it this way the result is humbling, for we recognize that we do not love as Jesus loves. We do not even understand such love. And we find ourselves praying, "Oh, Lord Jesus, teach me to love others as you love."

When we pray this way God will help us, and we will begin to grow in the love and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let Us Love

We should get more out of this command than the disciples did on the first occasion on which it was spoken. We think that they must have been struck by these great words and have remembered them vividly, but this was not the case. On the contrary, not one of them really heard the command or understood what it meant.

We know this because of the course of the discussion that follows verse 35. We remember that Jesus had begun his discussion of the new command by informing the disciples that he was going to leave them and that they would not be able to follow him in his departure. They heard this, and it filled them with dismay. It crowded all other thoughts from their minds. Next, Jesus talked about his new command, but they did not hear him, for he had barely finished talking about it when Peter

broke in to ask, "But, Lord, where are you going?" Peter had been thinking about Christ's earlier announcement and was returning to it. Jesus stopped to deal with Peter's questions, and before he could get back to the subject of the new commandment Thomas responded, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered Thomas, and he never did get back to the great command.

Jesus is not frustrated by human preoccupation, however. So, after many years had passed, the Holy Spirit spoke to John the evangelist, who was present on the earlier occasion, and caused him to write a book which is in one sense an exposition of the new commandment. The book is 1 John, and it expounds the new commandment completely.

In all, the new command is talked about in four separate passages: 1 John 2:7-11; 3:11-18; 4:721; and 5:1-5. But the key passage is 4:7-21, in which the words "love one another" occur three times. In each case a different reason is given why this exhortation must be heeded.

The first reason why we should love one another is that love is *God's nature.* John says, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God; for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8). John's argument is that, if we truly are God's children, we will bear the characteristics of our Father.

Second, John tells us that we should love because love led to *God's gift.* In these verses John reminds us that we were spiritually dead men and women before God the Father sent his Son to die for us. Being dead we were not able even to understand what he had done. But when Christ died for us, and when by the work of the Holy Spirit we were made alive spiritually, we were able to believe on Christ and recognize the love of God in Christ, which stood behind the sacrifice. Consequently, having thus come to know love and take the measure of love, we are to love. John's way of putting it is: "This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might

live through him.... Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (vv. 9, 11).

Finally, we are told that we should love one another in that love is *God's present and continuing activity.* God is not creating the world today; he has already done that. He is not sending Jesus to die; Jesus has already died. What God is doing is working in Christians through love in order that others who do not yet know him might see him through such divine activity. John writes: "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us [and, thus, men see him]" (v. 12).

Do those who are not yet Christians see God in you? It is a breathtaking thought. But this verse teaches that they can and will, if you will love others. Will you? Remember, this is not a divine invitation, as if Jesus had said, "Won't you please love others?" It is not even one of a series of steps to successful living, as if he had said, "You will be happier if you love one another." It is Christ's new command. Love one another! God grant that we shall and that, in doing so, we may truly be his disciples.

Chapter 172.
Marks of a True Disciple

John 13:35

Once when I was working for the evangelical thought journal *Christianity Today*, I heard Carl F. H. Henry, then the editor, say that he wished Christians in our day could have an easily identifiable mark that would at once distinguish them as Christians. "Something like an armband," he said. That was some time ago. Since then, the Jesus Movement gave us the sign of an upraised index finger, meaning "One Way." I have noticed that now even evangelicals are often wearing crosses and other religious symbols. But for some reason, Henry's

remark has stuck with me through the years, and it has made me notice "signs" or writings about signs that I might not have noticed otherwise.

One important essay was entitled "The Mark of the Christian" by Francis Schaeffer. It appeared first as a small booklet and then as a final postscript in the volume *The Church at the End of the 20th Century.* That study was based on John 13:35, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." According to Schaeffer, love is "the mark that Jesus gives to label a Christian not just in one era or in one locality but at all times and all places until Jesus returns."

Another piece along the same lines is a chapter in the book *The Love Life* by Donald Grey Barnhouse. It is entitled "Art Not Thou Also One of His Disciples?" and is based on the text I have already mentioned, John 13:35, plus two others: John 8:31 and John 15:8. In this study I want to take these three texts and, using what has been written about them, explore the essential features of one who would be Christ's true disciple.

There is a popular use of the word "Christian" by which many would claim to be Christians who are, nevertheless, not disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ at all. Barnhouse points out that the word "Christian" originally came about because those who believed in Christ at Antioch followed him so closely that those who observed them wanted to identify them by the name of their Master.
The people of Antioch said, "These are followers of Christ. They are Christ-ones, Christians.
They follow him. They are his." Today, by contrast everyone calls himself a Christian. By some, America is called a Christian nation. Anything that has even the vague flavor of Western religion or culture about it gets the name. But few who call themselves Christians actually follow Jesus.

Obviously, there is a kind of Christianity that is like this, but it is not discipleship. True discipleship is far different. What is it? It is expressed well in 2 Corinthians 8:5, "They gave themselves first to the Lord and

to us in keeping with God's will." Discipleship is giving oneself wholeheartedly to Jesus.

Continuing in Christ's Word

The three texts in John's Gospel I have just mentioned show the marks of a true disciple. The first of these is John 8:31. "To the Jews who believed him Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.'" The first mark of a disciple is continuation in the word that Christ has spoken.

Two things are necessary if we are truly to do this. First, we must *hear* that Word; this means that we must read it, study it, memorize it, and continually put ourselves in a place where it is faithfully taught. The trouble with the discipleship of many begins right here. The Word is taught, but they do not want to hear it. The Word is available, but they do not like what it says. So they hide from it. What are such Christians like? They are like the man Harry Ironside tells about in one of his writings. The man had come to church occasionally with his wife, but he was very irregular in his attendance. So Ironside asked the wife about it. "Doesn't your husband like coming to church?" he asked.

"I think he does," she said. "But he has difficulty with your sermons. He hears the teachings, but he doesn't like them. So he stays home. He says that if he comes one Sunday, it takes him weeks to get over it."

That is true for many. And that is one reason why people who used to be seen around your church are not seen there so often. They know what the Word of God says, but they do not want to heed it. So they refuse to listen, and eventually they reject even their Christian friends. It is interesting that in this same chapter of John there is a verse in which Christ speaks to his enemies, saying, "Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say" (v. 43). Here were unbelievers who, lacking the Holy Spirit, were unable even to hear Christ's speech. No wonder they misunderstood him. But what are we to think of those who claim to possess the Holy Spirit, who should be able to understand Christ's words, but who refuse to hear them?

The second thing that is necessary, after we have heard Christ's word, is to *continue* in it. This means to continue to hold to it by faith, even though we may not understand it fully. The disciples were doing this. We remember as we read this chapter that Jesus had been preaching some startling truths to those who would listen to him, and as a result people were overflowing with questions. "How can a man be born again when he is old?" "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" "What does he mean, 'You will look for me and not find me and where I go you cannot come?'" These were the questions that were raised by his teachings. But we notice that they were raised by the people at large and not by the disciples. The disciples followed him and, therefore, although they certainly did not know all the answers, they believed what they understood and continued in it faithfully.

Barnhouse, from whom I am borrowing much of this material, tells the story of an eight-year-old girl who was joining a church. One of the elders asked her, "Have you read the Bible?" 'Yes, I have."

"Do you understand it?"

"Yes," she said, "all of it!"

Well, that is very nice. For her age and mentality, she had understood what she had read. Moreover, it had spoken to her heart, and she had heeded it. This is what the disciples were doing. It is what each of us should do. We may not understand all that is in the Bible. Indeed, we do not. But we can understand what we know and follow in it. Barnhouse writes: "Obviously the disciples did not understand everything, but they believed what they knew and they continued in His doctrine. As soon as they learned more, they believed that also; for that's the method in Christian life. We are not born again with the full content of doctrine neatly stored in categories in our brain cells, but we go on as babes. We walk as children, desiring the sincere milk of the Word that we may grow thereby." Unquestioning faith is the first mark of a true disciple.

Love One Another

The second mark of a disciple is found in the verse to which we have come in our study of John 13, verse 35. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." It is this verse that is the basis of Schaeffer's study.

There is a unique quality in this verse that sets it off from the others we are considering. It is Christ's reference to the world. In the first verse (John 8:31), Jesus says that continuing in his word will make those listening to his word be his disciples indeed. But there is no reference to how this will affect the world. In the verse to which we come next (John 15:8), Jesus says that a disciple is one who bears "much fruit." But the content refers to the fact that the bearing of fruit will glorify God, not that it will affect humanity, although, of course, it does. It is only in this second verse (John 13:35), with its emphasis upon observable love, that the world is taken into serious consideration. Why is this so? It is so because of what Jesus says about love. Jesus says that it is the mark by which his disciples are to be known as Christians, not only to him or to one another, but to everyone.

Schaeffer says that this is frightening, and he is right. For it is as if 'Jesus turns to the world and says, 'I've something to say to you. On the basis of my authority, I give you a right: You may judge whether or not an individual is a Christian on the basis of the love he shows to all Christians.' In other words, if people come up to us and cast in our teeth the judgment that we are not Christians because we have not shown love toward other Christians, we must understand that they are only exercising a prerogative that Jesus gave them.

"And we must not get angry. If people say, 'You don't love other Christians,' we must go home, get down on our knees, and ask God whether or not they are right. And if they are, then they have a right to have said what they said."

What kind of love must we show if the world is to look at it and conclude that it is explainable only by the fact that we are Christians? Obviously it must be a special kind of love. What are its characteristics? How does such a special love operate? Fortunately, the answer to these

questions is given to us in 1 John, a book that, as suggested in the last study, was written in some measure as a commentary on the new commandment.

In one sense, nearly everything in 1 John deals with the new command, for even its other two great themes (righteousness and sound doctrine) relate to it. But to be concise, it is possible to find a rich and fully rewarding answer in just three verses, 3:16-18. These verses say, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." These verses teach that one aspect of Christian love is its action. Moreover, they show that such love is to be exercised at personal cost, if need be, and that it is to be shown to anyone who is needy.

One thing John says is that "we ought to lay down our lives" for one another. Obviously, it is not often the case, at least today, that Christians are called upon to lay down their lives in the literal sense. But just because this is so, we should not pass over the idea too quickly. True, we do not often have opportunities to literally die for someone else. But we do have opportunities to "die to self or, as we could also say, to "sacrifice our own interests" continually.

The gospel of God's love in Jesus Christ has never been taken to anyone but that some Christian has sacrificed for it to happen. Even if it only means crossing the street to bear a simple witness, some Christian has thought about it, prayed about it, and then ventured to do it (sometimes with great fear and trembling), risking the loss of the friendship or even ridicule. Farther afield the sacrifices are greater. Parents sacrifice their children to allow them to go to distant lands where they may even die in God's service. Individuals send money to support these children and to underwrite other works. Some give their time to Christian social service projects, all at some (and sometimes even great) personal sacrifice.

Another place for sacrifice is the home. Today's culture glories in self-satisfaction, teaching that if one is not personally and fully satisfied, he or she therefore has a right to break off the marriage relationship. But this is not God's teaching. God's teaching is that we are to die to self in order that the other person might be fulfilled and that it is only as this begins to happen that we ourselves find satisfaction. Do you show observable Christian love in your home? Can unbelievers tell that you are a Christian by the way you treat your wife or your husband?

John's words in verse 18 are a true conclusion. "Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." It is when we love sacrificially and by deeds that we show ourselves truly to be Christ's disciples.

Fruit-bearing

The third mark of a true disciple is found in John 15:8. "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." Fruit-bearing is the third mark of being a disciple.

The context of John 15 gives the steps for successful fruit-bearing, and the first is to recognize *our own inability* to produce it. Three verses before this, in verse 5, Jesus says, "Apart from me you can do nothing." Does it say, "Apart from me you cannot do the *big things.* Apart from me you cannot do *much*"? No, that is not it at all. It says, "Apart from me you can do *nothing*." So the first step toward successful fruit-bearing is to recognize our own nothingness and so start with Christ. Activity is no substitute.

Barnhouse tells a story in which he discusses this problem. A man came to him once, after he had given a portion of his life to Christian work, and said, "It's all been fruitless." "How did it begin?" Barnhouse asked.

The man sadly told the following story. "I remember so well," he said. "I was in my room studying, and as I was looking at the Bible, the Holy Spirit started to speak to me. He was putting His finger on things in my

life that shouldn't have been there. It made me restless and I closed the Bible, got up, and went out into the other room and picked up the telephone. I called another Christian and said, 'You know, I am greatly moved at the need for such and such a thing; couldn't we start a Christian work for them?' Well, we got together and we started a Christian work, and we gave ourselves to that great activity—work, work, work—and nothing ever came of it." The reason why there was no fruit-bearing was that there was no true discipleship.

Then there is the second step for successful fruit-bearing, and this is to *remain* in Jesus. To recognize that we can do nothing is connected with remaining, of course; for when we know our need we are encouraged by that very knowledge to abide in Jesus. Nevertheless, the two are not the same. To recognize our nothingness is negative. To remain is a positive thing. It is to draw near when the Spirit begins to speak through the Word (as he did in Barnhouse's story), and to change our way of living accordingly (as the man did not). "Remain in me, and I in you," said Jesus. For "no branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4). To remain in Christ is to allow him to work through us for Christ's glory.

Are You a Disciple?

John 13:35 is followed by three verses in which Jesus foretells his denial by Peter. When Jesus was arrested Peter was unwilling to go home without knowing the full outcome. So he followed afar off and eventually saw Jesus taken into the courtyard of the high priest. The soldiers undoubtedly shut the large door after them. But there was a smaller door, kept by a maid; and John, who knew the house and had access, went to this door and called Peter. As Peter passed through the entrance, the maid who kept the door asked, "Are you not one of this man's disciples?"

Unfortunately, Peter forgot the protestations he had made earlier and, so, denied his Master. "I am not," he said. Then, while warming himself

by the fire that warmed Jesus' enemies, he denied him twice more. The incident shows that even one of the inner band of the apostles may yet fail in discipleship.

Are we Jesus' disciples? Are you? Am I?

No doubt most of us will answer gladly, 'Yes, I am his disciple." But as we think about it, let us think about discipleship according to the definition Jesus himself gave to it. Jesus defined a disciple as one who continues in his Word, loves the brethren, and bears much fruit. Do we do each of these? Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, then you are really my disciples." He said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." He said, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." God grant that we may do each of these things as we drop all lesser loyalties and draw ever closer to him.

Chapter 173.
Darkness before the Dawn

John 13:36-38

John 13, which concludes with Jesus' warning to Peter that he would deny him, has two main characters other than the Lord himself: Judas and Peter. Judas betrayed his Lord. Peter denied him. Looking at the matter from the outside, as we sometimes do, there seems to be little difference between the two acts; each was a failure to stand by Christ in his hour of apparent need. Yet, by looking more closely we see there is a world of difference. One act was that of an antagonist. The other was a momentary failure by one who at heart was still a great friend and disciple of the Lord.

William Barclay puts the contrast like this: 'Judas' betrayal of Jesus was absolutely deliberate; it was carried out in cold blood; it must have been the result of careful thought and careful planning; and in the end it

deliberately and callously refused the most poignant appeal. But there was never anything in this world less deliberate than Peter's denial of Jesus. Peter never meant to do it. He was swept away by a moment of weakness."

We would add to Barclay's analysis that the reason for the difference is that Judas, unlike Peter, was not a true believer in Christ. Consequently, when John gets to the end of Judas's story, telling how he left the company of the Twelve to conspire to give his master over into the hands of his enemies, he concludes, "and it was night." This is the night of eternal darkness brought about by a separation from God. By contrast, the prophecy of Peter's denial is at once followed by Christ's words of reassurance, "Do not let your heart be troubled" (John 14:1).

The story of Peter's denial is not as depressing as that of Judas' betrayal. Yet it is hardly encouraging either. For if Peter, the acknowledged leader of the Twelve, fell, so can any of us.

Anyone Can Fall

This is really the first lesson of these verses, and it should not be passed over quickly. It needs to be made often. Paul makes the point in the first half of 1 Corinthians 10:13, a verse about temptation. "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

As we read that verse we notice that the first half indicates that temptation will come to everyone, for this is "common to man." This is not Paul's main point. It is only a secondary one. Paul's main point is that God has provided a way for his children to escape temptations. When temptations come, they are not to think that they are experiencing something extraordinary and therefore despair, but rather they are to know that they are only experiencing what others have experienced before them and so turn to God, who has delivered others and can

deliver them. This is Paul's main point. But basic to it is the truth that temptations do come to everyone and that anyone can fall into them.

One of the devil's tricks in temptation is to get us to think that the temptation is somehow extraordinary and, thus, that we cannot possibly be expected to resist it. But if that fails, he would like us to think instead that we are beyond temptation.

Sometimes we get to thinking that we are too old, that the battle has passed us by, that we are on vacation (or some such thing), and that we therefore do not need to be on guard against sinning. If that is the case, we need to learn from David in regard to his great sin with Bathsheba. How old do you suppose David was when he sinned with Bathsheba? We tend to think of sexual sins as being sins of youth, of the time when a young man is supposed to sow his wild oats. But this was not the case with David. David must have been at least fifty years old. He had served for some time under Saul, followed by years in hiding, followed by a reign of seven and a half years at Hebron (beginning when he was thirty years old), followed by a reign in Jerusalem during which time he subdued most of Israel's enemies. It was only at the end of this period, when he had made the mistake of staying home from one of the battles, that he saw Bathsheba bathing on a roof near the palace, invited her over, and committed adultery with her.

On the other hand, we look at Peter and find him to be in the prime of life. Moreover, we find him well aware of the dangers that faced both himself and the others at this time in Christ's ministry. He is as prepared to face them as anyone could be. Peter had heard Thomas say, as the little company was about to go up to Jerusalem for the last time, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). He knew that danger threatened. Besides, he had bought a sword. We know this because, when the enemies of Christ came to arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter drew the sword and went after the man who appeared to be leading the column.

Finally, we notice that Peter (unlike David) had even been warned of what was coming. This is what our text is about. Jesus had foretold his

own departure, and Peter had objected, saying, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."

Jesus replied, "Will you lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times" (vv. 37-38). This is ironic, of course, for it was actually the Lord who was about to lay down his life for Peter. Nevertheless, in these words Peter had a prophecy of the danger that awaited him. He had only to remain faithful until morning, until the cock should crow. Yet in spite of the fact that he understood the danger, was prepared to meet it, and was forewarned by the Lord's own solemn prophecy, he fell.

David was *not* prepared for temptation, so he fell. Peter *was* prepared, yet he also fell. The point is that anyone can fall. Temptations come to anyone, at any age, at any time, and anyone can fall into sin as a result of them.

Steps of Peter's Fall

The second truth we should notice as we study these verses is that there were steps to Peter's fall. When a fall comes, it seems to come suddenly, without warning. But it is seldom the case that a fall is without some sad preparation.

A number of years ago, Philadelphia television stations showed a film recording the spectacular demolition of the Hotel Traymore in Atlantic City. The Traymore was one of the grand old resort hotels, constructed of great blocks of stone, to which generations of Philadelphians had gone for vacation during the hot summer months. It was an Atlantic coast landmark. Yet it had become obsolete and was sold to make way for newer construction. Many people knew of the sale, but few were prepared for the suddenness with which the old hotel would come down. One minute it was there on the television screens; the next, there was a blast and the old hotel simply gave way and settled into the rising clouds of dust. The whole demolition took only one or two minutes. Someone looking at this might be amazed at how this could happen. "How could the hotel be destroyed so suddenly?" he might ask. But a

person who knew what was involved could explain that for months the demolition experts had been working within the hotel to place explosives within the main support columns and to wire the charges so that they would detonate together. It seemed the work of a moment. It was actually the result of a long process of careful preparation. It is the same with temptation. The fall seems sudden; but it is prepared by numerous steps, as the fall of Peter indicates.

The first step in Peter's fall was *overconfidence.* This is evident in every part of the story, but particularly from the questions Peter asked. The Lord had told Peter that he was going away and that Peter could not follow him, and Peter had asked, "Lord, where are you going?" In this context, the question is not as straightforward as it seems to be. It is actually a protest against Jesus' having told him that he, Peter, could not come after him. It really means, "I will follow you wherever you go. Tell me where you are going, so I may prove it." Then, when Jesus had replied by repeating that Peter could not follow him now but that he would hereafter, Peter had protested, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." This was little short of a direct contradiction of the Lord's words, for Peter was implying that he could follow Christ, in proof of which he was prepared to lay down his life for him.

What are we to think of Peter's audacity? We cannot condemn it completely, for it obviously flowed from love for Christ and from a desire to abide with him always. But it was also ignorant, and it flowed from overconfidence. What did "following" Jesus mean? Peter did not really know what was involved. Moreover, he had not yet learned the truth of Christ's statement recorded just a chapter later: "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

In his overconfidence Peter failed, not at his weakest point, but at his strongest. He was no coward. He was ready to die for Jesus; yet, he trembled at the innocent question of a serving maid. How is this to be explained? Pink answers, "Only on the ground that [God permitted it] in order to teach him and us the all-important lesson, that if left to ourselves, the strongest is as weak as water. It is in conscious weakness

that our strength lies (2 Cor. 12:10)." Pink adds correctly that we often look down on others in their sin and imagine that what they are doing we could not possibly do. But we are wrong in thinking that way. For the "seeds of *every* sin are latent in our hearts, even when renewed, and they only need occasion, or carelessness, or the withdrawal of God's grace for a season, to put forth an abundant crop."

We need to know this, for if we would conquer temptation, we must begin with the knowledge that, unless Christ holds us, we are bound to fall. Elsewhere I have told the story of a friend of mine who once had a job of stringing wires at a summer camp. To do this he had to climb a telephone pole. I was there as he was taught. "In order to climb the pole you have to lean back," he was told. "Lean back on the broad leather belt that surrounds you and the pole. It will hold you. You need to lean back or else your spikes will not press into the wood and hold, and you will slip." My friend listened and then tried it. But he was afraid to lean back. So his spikes would not enter the wood, and he got nowhere at all. At last he got the idea. He leaned back, the spikes took hold, and he began to climb. Unfortunately, when he was about three feet off the ground he got worried about falling and thought that he could improve things somewhat if he just pulled himself closer to the pole. But when he did that the spikes came out, and he slipped back down, getting covered with splinters in the process.

It is the same spiritually. God has ordered life in such a way that we cannot climb spiritually without leaning on him, trusting him to hold us. If we do not lean on Jesus, God will allow us to slip (as Peter did) and get covered with splinters. He will allow this so that we will come to trust him and not ourselves.

A Downward Path

The next step in Peter's fall was a *failure to pray.* This is a connecting failure, of course; for being confident of his own ability, Peter did not feel his need of God and so failed to ask him for help.

Again, this should never have happened. For if we read the parallel accounts of this evening's activities, we find that Jesus had explicitly warned the disciples to pray. "Pray that you will not fall into temptation" were his words. In all, he said this three times. He said it when he and the disciples had first entered the Garden of Gethsemane and he was about to withdraw to pray privately (Luke 22:40). He said it a second time to Peter after he had returned and found the disciples sleeping (Matt. 26:40-41; Mark 14:37-38). He said it a third time just before the multitude arrived to arrest him and Judas kissed him as the mark of identification (Luke 22:46). Peter was told to pray three times. Yet so great was his confidence, or drowsiness, which is much the same thing, that he let his opportunity pass by and was unprepared when the temptation to deny Jesus eventually overtook him.

Do you pray lest temptation overtake you? Do you "pray without ceasing," as Paul admonished those at Thessalonica to do (1 Thess. 5:17)? I know that it is hard work. At times it is terribly difficult. But there is no time when we need more to pray than when we feel too tired to do it or when the cares of the world press in upon us, depress us, or dull our thinking.

There was a third step to Peter's fall. Luke tells us about it, saying that, when they had arrested
Jesus and were leading him to the house of the high priest, "Peter *followed at a distance*" (Luke 22:54). Under the circumstances, we can understand how it happened. At the moment of the arrest the disciples scattered in panic, most of them apparently making their way back over the Mount of Olives in the darkness to Bethany where they had been spending each evening of the Passover week. The psychology of the narrative indicates that they would flee away from Jerusalem, where the danger lay, to Bethany, rather than in the direction in which the Lord was taken. But Peter apparently did not run, or else hid for a time or stopped running, with the result that he saw Jesus being led away and followed after him, while being hidden by the darkness. It is understandable. It is what I would have done. But where is the bravery of that one who said he would die with Jesus if that should be

necessary? Where is Peter's courage now? Peter was caught off guard; he was not praying as Jesus was. So fear had suddenly conquered his heart, and he was hiding lest he be detected.

What Peter did on this occasion is characteristic of too many Christians. They want to be followers of Jesus, but they follow afar off for fear of the consequences. They know rightly that the focus of the warfare is where Jesus stands. So they think they will be safer if they are not so close to him. Are they safer? Of course not. The only safety for any disciple is to follow closely behind Jesus.

Then, finally, toward the end of the story, we find Peter warming himself at the fire in the courtyard of the high priest. He is *in the company of Christ's enemies and is benefiting from them.* This is not to be taken as meaning that we should forego all contact with the world, for we should not. Jesus himself said that he was leaving us in the world rather than taking us from the world so that we might be a witness to the world. But it does mean that we must not profit from the activities of those who would do Christ harm. Moreover, we must avoid becoming too chummy with them, for we lose our integrity in that way and then cannot stand for Jesus. Peter failed to guard himself at this point. Consequently he fell into an incognito role and soon denied his Lord—at the last, we are told, even with oaths and cursings (Matt. 26:74; Mark 14:71).

Is this to be our path? Temptations will come, and we can succumb to them. We can be like Peter in his downward path. Or we can resist. To resist we must do the opposite of what Peter did on this occasion. First, rather than being overly confident, we must be underconfident. Or, to speak more correctly, we must refuse to have confidence in ourselves at all. Second, we must pray regularly and earnestly. Third, we must follow closely behind Jesus, not afar off as Peter did. Finally, we must be careful not to profit from the activities of those who are really Christ's enemies.

Not Cast Off

At this point our study of Peter's denial could properly stop, for we have learned enough to profit immensely. But we should not only see that anyone can fall and the steps that led to Peter's fall, which we have seen. We should also see the activity of Jesus on Peter's behalf, knowing that he was about to fall. What did Jesus do? He warned Peter, that is true. But that is not all he did. We are also told: (1) that Jesus prayed for Peter, and (2) that he later came to Peter in order to recommission him to service.

First, Jesus prayed for Peter. And, as we might expect, his prayers were answered. Luke tells us about it in his Gospel. In this account Jesus is speaking to Peter and says the following: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith will not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31, 32). Put in language that we can better understand, this means that Satan had come to Jesus boasting that Peter was nothing but a bag of hot air and that if he, Satan, were allowed to blow on him, Peter would sail away like chaff when the wind separates it from the grain at threshing time. Jesus answered that there was indeed a great deal of chaff in Peter but that Satan was wrong in thinking that Peter was nothing but chaff. "My grain is in Peter," he said. "Consequently, I will let you blow on him; but when you are done all you will have succeeded in doing is blowing away some of the chaff. Peter will be stronger than before." Here Jesus announced Peter's victory even before it happened. But he added that he would pray for Peter that his faith would not fail. Peter would fail to pray, but the Lord would pray for him.

Second, the Lord appeared to Peter after Peter's fall and after his own resurrection to recommission him. The story is found in the postscript to John's Gospel. Peter had denied three times. The Lord asked three times, "Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?"

Three times Peter answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus replied, "Feed my sheep."

Did Jesus cast off Peter? He had every reason to do so. Peter had denied him. He might have judged Peter unfit for further service or even for salvation. But this is not the Lord's way. He came again to recommission Peter to service. Did God cast off Abraham after he had left Ur of the Chaldees for the Promised Land but had stopped at Haran? No. God came to Abraham a second time with the identical promise of great spiritual blessing. Did God cast off Moses after Moses had decided that he could free his people by his own strength, killed an Egyptian, and then had to flee from Egypt to Midian? No. God came to Moses with a new revelation of himself, one that contained a promise to do what Moses had attempted but had found himself unable to do. Did God cast off Jonah after Jonah had fled from him, falling so deeply into sin that he declared he would rather die than go to Nineveh? No. God came to Jonah a second time also.

So God comes to us a second, third, fourth, even a hundredth or thousandth time, if necessary, that we might fellowship with him. Moreover, none of us would be where we are at this moment if God had not so operated with us. We are unfaithful; yet he abides faithful. He loves each of his own "to the end" (John 13:1). Do we deserve it? No. But we can respond to it, saying, as did Isaac Watts,

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss, And pour contempt on all my pride.
Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were a present far too small:
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

When we think that we are standing, we are about to fall. But when we conquer our pride and lean upon Jesus, we find him to be all we need. We love him, and we find his love sufficient for each emergency.

Chapter 174.
Calm Words for Troubled Hearts

John 14:1-3

What is a Christian to do when the world he knows falls in? What is he to do in the day of great trouble?

This is not an idle question because, although we do not always like to think about it, life *is* filled with troubles. Disappointment is a trouble, and there are many disappointments. We are disappointed with ourselves, for we are not always what we want to be. We want to be strong, but we are weak. We want to be successful, but we experience many failures. We want to be liked, but often people are at best indifferent to us. We are also often disappointed with other people, with a husband, wife, son, daughter, friend, employer, partner, employee, or whatever the case may be.

Circumstances, too, are a source of troubles. In some cases we can do something about the circumstances, and we try to; but this is not always so. Poverty cannot always be changed, and poverty is troubling. The loss of a loved one is also beyond our control, and this is devastating. So is loss of a job, sickness, or even uncertainty about the future, the last of which is particularly unsettling in these times.

And what about spiritual troubles, when it seems as though the Lord's presence is withdrawn and we are plunged alone into what has well been described as the "dark night" of the soul? What are we to do in such circumstances? What are we to do with despair? The answer is that we are to take ourselves in hand and by a deliberate exercise of mind strengthen our faith in God. We are to think of him and so overcome trouble by reminding ourselves of the power and promises of God and by trusting in him.

Our text is a call to us to become strong Christians, not the kind who weep and wail and expect everyone to pity them, but rather the kind who are of great stature in faith and who are a source of strength to others. The text says, "*Do not let* your hearts be troubled" (John 14:1).

Cause to Be Troubled

There are two important things about this text, and the first, quite paradoxical in view of what I have just said, is that frequently we have cause to be troubled.

It would not be necessary to make so much of this point if it were not that there is a kind of Pollyanna Christianity in our day that seeks to deny it. It is the kind of Christianity that pretends that there are no troubles for any truly surrendered child of God. This view of life takes Romans 8:28 to mean that only good things come into the life of one who truly loves God ("And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him"), rather than seeing that the verse actually says that evil will indeed come but that God will nevertheless accomplish his own good purposes in spite of it. This view is unrealistic and uninformed, for evil does exist. Troubles do come. Death is an enemy. So, rather than denying these things, we must begin by a realistic recognition of them.

Obviously, it was this that prompted Christ's saying, for it was clear to him that from a human viewpoint the disciples, to whom he was speaking, had cause for deep agitation.

For one thing, he himself had been troubled. We know this because we are told about it in the previous chapter: "After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit" (v. 21). Was this not unusual and troubling in itself? Was it not a cause for dismay that he who had been their stay in every troubled sea, their refuge in every hostile crowd, should be troubled? Moreover, he had also indicated that he was about to be taken from them. He had said it before, but they had not fully understood him. Now the message got through, and they were in turmoil. He was their life. For him they had left family, home, and occupation. What would

they do once he was gone from them? What could fill the void left in their aching and anxious hearts?

Nor is this all. If there were nothing more, the disciples might have comforted themselves with the thought that, regardless of what might happen, still they loved him and would be faithful to him or to his memory forever. But they were really not free to think this, for he had told them that one of their number, Judas, should betray him, and that another, Peter, should deny him three times before morning.

Did the disciples have cause to be troubled? Certainly they did! From this we learn that it is not wrong to honestly recognize and even analyze our problems.

We may add another point also. It is also not wrong to recognize and openly acknowledge things that trouble others. Here is a useful principle in counseling. Sometimes when a person comes to us with a problem, as people do to me constantly, we want to minimize their problem. We want to say, "But that is not so bad. Think how things could be worse." We may even want to tell stories of those we know who were in even worse circumstances. But we must not do this. Nothing is gained by minimizing the problems. Instead, we must hear the troubled soul out, and we must acknowledge that in many, if not all, cases there is that which rightly troubles him. Indeed, we must even "mourn with those who mourn," as Paul says in the great ethical section of the letter to the Romans (12:15).

More Cause Not to Be

So Christians are realists. They are realists about all life's problems. At the same time, however, we must add that they are realists about the power of God and his promises. And this means that although there is cause to be troubled, nevertheless, there is even greater cause not to be. This is the second important point. Regardless of what there may be to cause us to be troubled as Christians, there is more cause not to be troubled.

What are the reasons why we should not be troubled? In these verses there are five of them. First, we know Jesus. He is God. He knows about us and our circumstances. He is able to deal with them. Therefore, there is every reason to trust him. Jesus indicates this when he issues the challenge, "Trust in God, trust also in me."

Frankly, there are a number of ways in which these lines may be taken, due to the fact that in both parts of the sentence the verb "trust" may be in either the indicative ("You trust") or the imperative mood ("Trust!"). In Greek the two forms are identical. Thus, there are four ways to translate the sentence: (1) "You trust in God; you also trust in me"; (2) "Trust in God! Trust in me!" (3) "You trust in God; trust in me also"; and (4) "Trust in God, as you trust in me." Of these four, the first may be rejected because it is nothing more than a statement, and an exhortation of some kind is demanded by the context. The last may also be rejected because it suggests a backward relationship. The disciples were obviously not to begin with their faith in Jesus and then work up to faith in God, for it is a need for faith in Christ that is indicated. So possibilities two and three are left: "You trust in God; trust also in me" and 'Trust in God; trust in me!"

To be sure, there is not a great deal of difference in these two translations, and both make good theology. Still, in spite of the great weight of many recent versions, it seems to the writer that the translation of the older, Authorized Version is preferable. Why should the disciples be urged to believe in God in this situation? True, it is always good to be urged to believe in God, but in this situation the problem is that Jesus was about to be taken from the disciples and that they were troubled by thoughts of this parting. They did not really doubt that God would take care of them in some far off, general sense. But they did not understand how Jesus could go, how he could apparently be abandoning them. So what does Christ say? In these circumstances it is as though he turns to the disciples and says, "Look, I know that you trust God; trust me also, precisely in these circumstances. Believe that I know what I am doing, that I am going away for a purpose, that the purpose will be accomplished, and that I

will again return to you so that we can be together." This he said in the face of his own execution.

Here was the first reason why the disciples were not to be troubled. They knew Jesus, and they had every reason to trust him.

So do we. In fact, we have even more cause than those first disciples, for they stood on the far side of the resurrection and did not know, as we do, that the cross of Christ was our salvation or that the resurrection was to follow it. Did Jesus know what he was doing? Of course he did! Could he be trusted? Certainly! Then let us also trust him. Whatever the circumstances, whatever the hardship, let us believe that he has a purpose in those circumstances and is most certainly working them out for our own spiritual good.

A Home in Heaven

The second reason Jesus gives why we should not be troubled is that there is a place prepared for us in heaven. "In my Father's house are many rooms," he said; "if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you" (v. 2).

For many people, talk of a home in heaven smacks of escapism, as if in the face of trials the Christian is to turn his back upon life and live only for glory. It is the "pie-in-the-sky" philosophy. This has been true in some cases. Some have indeed turned from life when they should have been living it victoriously. Some have been escapists. But there are also circumstances where those who are not escapists have nevertheless gained great comfort and strength from these promises.

I think of one example. Not long ago I visited a member of my congregation who had been confined to a home for incurables because of crippling arthritis. She was always in constant pain and had wasted away in this home for many years. At this time this poor woman, who never complained and who never talked about herself or her condition unless someone asked about it, was near death. As we talked, I asked her, "Ida, do you still love Jesus?"

Her eyes glowed through her suffering as she replied, "Yes; oh yes! And I do long to be with him. I am so anxious for him to take me home." The death of a Christian is not like the death of an unbeliever, for the Christian knows where he or she is going. He is sure of his heavenly home.

Moreover, the *life* of a Christian is not (in most cases) like the life of an unbeliever. For, knowing his destiny, knowing that he will again see Jesus in that heavenly home, the faithful Christian follows him now and lives for him. Paul indicated this when he wrote: "Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.... But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:17, 20). John also speaks of this when he writes, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3). To know our destiny is a great incentive, not only for the enjoyment of peace in the midst of turmoil but for godly living as well.

Our Personal Dwelling

The third reason Jesus gave the disciples why they should not be troubled is that he was going to prepare a place for them. On the surface this seems to be much the same point as before; that is, that there is a heavenly home and that there are many abiding places in it. But it is not really a repetition. It is something more. There is a place called heaven. Jesus was going there. But in addition to this he tells them that there is work that he is going to do for them once he gets there.

What did Jesus refer to when he said that he was going to prepare a place for his disciples? I am not sure that there is a full answer to that question, because I do not know of any passage of the Bible that bears directly upon it. As I think about it, I wonder if the fact that we ask that question does not hide the verse's true meaning. We read the verse "I am going there to prepare a place for you" and focus on the word "prepare."

What if we were to focus on the words "for you" instead? In that case, the emphasis would not be upon whatever architectural alterations the Lord may be making in heaven, but rather upon the fact that it is for us as individuals that he is altering it. In other words, it would be the promise that in that great home of the Father's there is a place being prepared particularly for us.

Have you ever decorated a room for someone special? If you have, you know what it is to make a room suit one particular personality. If it is a daughter, you make the room pretty. You hang up her pictures. You make a place for her hobbies. If it is a son, the room might have airplanes or model cars. If it is for Grandma, the room might have her favorite books; and it might be far from the playroom or the children's bedrooms. We take care in such preparation. Are we to think that Jesus will take less care for those whom he loves, who are to spend eternity with him?

With Jesus

The fourth and fifth points may be taken together. They are: first, that Jesus is returning again for those whom he has left behind and, second, that from that point on they will be with him forever. He said, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (v. 3).

There have been those who have identified this coming of the Lord Jesus with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost spoken of later. But this is not right. In the case of the Spirit, Jesus comes to the believer and the believer receives him. In this verse, Jesus receives the believer so that the believer may be with him in heaven. Clearly, this is what Paul describes so vividly when he says, "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

There is comfort in that. Indeed, there must be; for Paul immediately follows this with the admonition; "Therefore encourage each other with these words" (v. 18).

We Can Do Something

At this point we return to the question asked at the beginning of this study: "What is a Christian to do when the world he knows falls in? What is he to do in the day of great trouble?" The answer once again is that he is to take himself in hand and by a deliberate exercise of mind, in which he brings such great truths as these to remembrance, increase his faith in God. He is to remind himself of and then meditate upon God's great strength and promises.

There are those for whom this does not sound spiritual at all and who, therefore, prefer to grope around in the dark, waiting for some great shaft of light to break through. But this was not Christ's teaching. He did not say, "Mull over your problems." He did not even say, "Tell me about them," though, of course, we are free to do that. He said, "*Do not* be troubled; *do not let* your present troubled state continue." So if Jesus says, "Do not let your heart be troubled," then our hearts *need* not be troubled. We can be victorious if we will remind ourselves of what we know of him and trust him.

Chapter 175.
A Place for You

John 14:2-3

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

One reason why those who believe in Jesus Christ should not be troubled by adverse circumstances is that they have a home in heaven. However, as soon as we begin to talk about heaven we create a problem, for in the thinking of most people heaven is not an interesting subject. This was not always so. There was a time in the history of the western world when thoughts about the life to come were popular. But ours is a secular and scientific age. Thus, in today's world, thoughts about heaven seem to be either a form of escapism or mere speculation.

Thoughts of Heaven

We suffer from this purely secular outlook, as will be shown. But as we begin to study about heaven, let us take note that heaven should be far more interesting to us than we naturally imagine. For one thing, we should recognize that heaven is likely to become increasingly interesting to us as we grow older. D. L. Moody tells of a man who testified that in his youth he thought of heaven largely as a great shining city, filled with vast walls, domes and towers, and populated by millions of angels, all of whom were strangers to him. But then his little brother died. After that he thought of heaven as a great shining city, filled with vast walls and towers and unknown angels, but now also with one little fellow he knew. When a second brother died there were two he knew. Acquaintances died. In time one of his children went to be with Jesus; this one was followed by another and then still another. By this time the man seldom thought of walls and towers. He thought of those residents of the Celestial City whom he knew, and his interest in heaven intensified. Toward the end of his life so many of his acquaintances had gone to heaven that it sometimes seemed to him that he knew more persons in heaven than he did on earth. And, of course, his thoughts fixed increasingly on that distant place.

Moreover, it is not only as we grow older that we should find heaven interesting. To be sure, when we are younger the emotional ties that bind an older person to those who have gone ahead are lacking. But we are going there some day, if we are Christians. Should we not be interested in the place where we will spend eternity?

I remember the great interest my wife and I had when, in the early days of our married life together, we determined to go to Europe where I was to pursue my graduate studies. Our destination was Basel, Switzerland, about which we knew virtually nothing. Were we disinterested? Not at all! I remember how we poured over maps and books containing geographical and other information, for we wanted to know what Basel was like. How big was Basel? What was the climate? Was it an old city or a new one? What was its history? What belongings should we take with us? Most people will recognize our interest in Basel to have been a proper one. How much greater should a Christian's interest be in that place to which Jesus has gone, which he is preparing for us.

Should we not have a great interest in these verses in which the Lord himself talks about heaven? Do we not want to ponder the words: "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (vv. 23)? I think we do. Therefore, although we have studied these verses once, we are going to deal with them again in this and the following study.

A Real Place

As we look closely at these words, the first thing we notice is that, according to Jesus, heaven is a genuine place. When we say this, we do not mean that we are therefore able to visualize it adequately, even with the help of biblical symbols. For example, we read in the Bible of a city whose streets are paved with gold. But we are not necessarily to think that these streets are like our streets or that the gold is what we identify as the seventy-ninth element on the atomic charts. Streets speak of permanence, gold of something precious and valuable that does not rust or deteriorate. In the same way, we do not think that there are necessarily literal crowns in heaven, although there may be. There may not be harps as we conceive of them. These things are symbols; so, while they point to reality, nevertheless they may not themselves be reality.

Yet none of this is to be taken as meaning that heaven is therefore anything less than a real place, as real, perhaps even as localized, as New York or San Francisco. On the occasion of his address in the upper room Jesus did not describe heaven, but he did call it a place to which he was going, from which he would return, and to which he would one day take all whom the Father had given him.

The word "heaven" is used in three different ways in the Bible. It is used of what we would call the atmosphere, the heaven of birds and clouds. It is used of those great spaces in which the planets and stars are found. This is sometimes also called "the firmament." Finally, it is used of the heaven of heavens, which is the home of God. It is this—a place just like the other places— about which these verses are speaking.

All this presents difficulties for some persons, and for two reasons. First, there are those who observe that God is described as being pure spirit—that is, as having no bodily form—and who therefore conclude that heaven is the abode or state of pure spirits. But the idea that heaven is merely a state and therefore everywhere and nowhere is not according to Scripture. True, God is a spirit; he does not have a concrete, visible form. But Jesus does. He has become man for all eternity. The angels also have bodies. So do we, not only in this life but also in the life to come. If this were not so, the teaching about the resurrection of the body would be meaningless. These bodies must be somewhere. As I read the accounts of Christ's postresurrection appearances, I recognize that the heavenly body of Christ (after which our heavenly bodies are patterned) possesses qualities that we do not yet have. His body could move through closed doors, for instance. It could vanish and then reappear. Still, it is a true body and must be localized. Heaven is the place where our bodies shall be, though we will presumably be able, like Jesus, to move freely.

The second reason why some people have difficulty thinking of heaven as a genuine place is linked to scientific considerations. These people are aware of the vast distances of our universe as well as the fact that no one using any of the gigantic telescopes of our time has ever seen anything like heaven. They say, "If Jesus had ascended into heaven

beginning in A.D. 30 and if he had accelerated until at last he was traveling at the speed of light, he would not yet have reached the farthest star, let alone heaven, wherever that may be located. How then are we to imagine that heaven is a real place, that Jesus went there, and that he is coming again to take us to be with him?"

This is an important problem. For if there is no material, spatial heaven, then the Lord Jesus Christ did not ascend into it in his body. And if this is so, then we must abandon the idea of a bodily resurrection of the Savior and all that goes with it, which is most of Christianity. Indeed, we will find ourselves in the position described by Paul when he declared that "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). But why, on the other hand, must we thus limit the Creator? On one occasion, when Donald Grey Barnhouse was asked a question about ascending at the speed of light, he replied, "Why do you wish to slow the Creator to the speed of light? He who created the universe is able to move with the speed of thought, and it is possible to think from here to the remotest point of the universe as quickly as it is to think down to the corner drugstore." We readily admit that we do not understand how this operates; we cannot think clearly beyond known physical laws. But God is not bound by the laws he has created. Consequently, all things—literally, *all things*—are possible to him.

Our Heavenly Home

There is a second thought in the phrase we have been considering, "a place for you." For it tells us that heaven is not only a place; it is a home. This is the import of the last two words, "for you."

As I have thought about this phrase I have been helped by the Swiss doctor Paul Tournier, who has taken the words as the title of one of his books on counseling. In that book, *A Place for You,* he deals with the idea of a place and of the need we all have for it. For instance, at the beginning of the book he tells of a young man whom he had once counseled. The young man had been born into an unhappy home, had developed a sense of failure—first failing to reconcile his parents and

then in an inability to settle down into any one area of life—and at last had come to see Tournier. Together they explored the young man's problems. On one occasion, as he was trying to look at himself objectively and put what he saw into words, the student looked up at his counselor and said, "Basically, I'm always looking for a place—for somewhere to be."

This, says Tournier as the book unfolds, is a basic desire of the human heart. It is the desire to have a genuine place of our own, a home, a place where we belong and know ourselves to belong. The problem, says the counselor, is that many people apparently never find this place and so spend much of life wandering.

Tournier is not insensitive to the need that we have to find a home spiritually. Here we think of Adam and Eve and of their expulsion from their garden home in Eden because of their sin. We think of Cain, who, because he killed his brother, was condemned to a life of wandering. He had no home. In Genesis 11 we find men trying to create a city in which homes will be established. But the men of Babel are in opposition to God, and so God scatters them. Again they are made homeless. Here, then, is a great motif of Genesis. Sin brings alienation, and one aspect of alienation is that men lose their home.

With the coming of Abraham we find a new and heartening element. To be sure, God's first dealings with Abraham are to take him from his home, for it is a sinful place filled with idols and idol worshipers. But in return for the place he has lost God promises him a new home—"a land I will show you" (Gen. 12:1). What is more, God gives the boundaries and indicates the specific territory involved. It is "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites,
Girgashites and Jebusites" (Gen. 15:18-21). The names are concrete. These are real names. They occur in real history. Thus they show God's awareness of the fact that the men and women he has created need a real place to be.

When we turn to the New Testament, we find Abraham praised, not because he fixed his hope on an earthly home (important as that is), but because he looked for a heavenly home. The Bible says, "For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10). This means that although earthly homes are necessary and valuable, they are nevertheless and at best not permanent and that, consequently, the basic need for a home (going back to Eden) is fully met only when the Lord Jesus Christ himself prepares a home for us in heaven. Now we are in a strange land, even in an enemy's country. But in that day we shall be in the Father's house and shall be home. This is our destiny.

Can anyone still feel that thoughts about heaven are otherworldly and therefore improper for Christians? Does anyone think that thoughts like these are escapism? This reality is anything but escapism.

Here again let me illustrate from Tournier's psychology. Take a child. Who is the child who spends a lifetime wandering about, always unable to find a place where he can belong and can make a sure contribution? Is it the child who has a home or the child who does not? Obviously, it is the child who does not have a home. Writes Tournier, "When the family is such that the child cannot fit himself into it properly, he looks everywhere for some other place, leading a wandering existence, incapable of settling down anywhere. His tragedy is that he carries about within himself this fundamental incapacity for any real attachment." On the other hand, "The child who has been able to grow up harmoniously in a healthy home finds a welcome everywhere. In infancy all he needs is a stick placed across two chairs to make himself a house, in which he feels quite at home. Later on, wherever he goes, he will be able to make any place his own, without any effort on his part. For him it will not be a matter of seeking, but of choosing."

It is the same spiritually. Who are those who seek to escape from this world? It is not those who are certain of a home in heaven. The ones who try to escape from this world are those who have no sure, spiritual mooring and who are therefore still searching. They may study theology and even write books about it, but they are lost. They have no sure

foundation, and their views and interests shift constantly. Those who do not try to escape are those who have their home. They may not be in it as yet. They may not even understand what it is like precisely, for they look through a glass darkly. Still, it is a home for them; and, therefore, because they have this home, they are at home anywhere. They can form friendships. They marry for life. They can commit themselves to a Christian work or even a secular work and labor for years without being restless and unfulfilled.

The world needs such satisfied men and women. It needs people who can be at home here—in spite of the world's evil—precisely because they have a home in heaven.

Do You Have a Home?

The final point is in the form of a question. Do you have a home? Are you one for whom Jesus has gone to prepare a place in heaven?

At the beginning of this chapter you read a story that was often related by that great evangelist D. L. Moody. Here is another. There was a man who had great wealth. He was dying. When the doctor told him he could not live, the lawyer was sent for to make out his will. The dying man had a little girl who was about four years old. She did not understand what death meant. But when her mother told her that her father was going away, the little child went to the bedside and looked into her father's eyes and asked, "Papa, have you got a home in that land you are going to?" The question sunk deep into the man's soul, for he had spent his time and energy accumulating great wealth. In this life he enjoyed a grand home, but now he had to leave it.

I would ask that of you. It is certain that you are going away, for it is appointed unto man once to die. Have you a home where you are going? Has the Lord Jesus Christ, your Savior, gone to prepare it for you?

If you want to be able to say yes to that question, all that is necessary is for Jesus to become your Savior, for he says that he has gone to prepare

a place for all who trust him. Apart from his work no one can enter heaven. Heaven is a place of holiness, and none but holy ones can dwell there. On the other hand, for all who trust his work, who believe that he is indeed the Savior from sin, that he died for them particularly, and who receive him as that Savior and promise to follow him as his faithful disciples until their life's end—for these heaven is that certain and blessed home that we have even now but that, nevertheless, still awaits us at our journey's end. If you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, do so now. Receive him as your Savior, and know the joy of possessing a place prepared for you by his own skilled hands.

Chapter 176.
Heaven

John 14:3-4

Many human beings are anxious about whether or not they will recognize their friends in heaven. They are Christian people. Often they have no doubt that they will *be* in heaven; for, as they point out, "to be away from the body [is to be] at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). Still they are confused about what is to happen in the life to come and wonder whether or not they will recognize those who have gone on before them. "Do you think I will know my Bill?" "Will I recognize Sally?" These are the questions they ask me, and I think that I understand them. For obviously, if we will not recognize our friends and family, then heaven inevitably loses much of its attractiveness for us. And—let us put it frankly—it is hard to see how we can really be happy there, regardless of how dazzling the streets or how beautiful the music of the angels.

On the other hand, there is also a sense in which I do not understand these questions. The reason I do not understand them is simply that the Word of God is so explicit about our mutual recognition. We *will* know each other. Bill will know Sally. Sally will know Bill. We will know

parents and children, friends, and those who have died in the Lord before us. This truth is suggested in our text. Therefore, I want to look at it again before we move on to other subjects.

We Will See Jesus

The place to begin in this discussion, however, is not with our recognition of each other and enjoyment of each other but with the fact that we will see Jesus and enjoy him. We begin here as a simple matter of priority, for we will want to see him even more than a departed husband, wife, parent, child, or grandparent. But we begin here for another reason also. We begin here because, if we begin with Jesus, then our reunion in heaven becomes (as it will be) a truly spiritual and godly reunion. If we forget this priority, then in our minds our reunion with loved ones becomes something only a little removed from a family get-together with all the failures of such a human affair.

This is what will make heaven a real home to us. True, having our loved ones there will be a part of it. But the thing that will make heaven a true home is being with Jesus. On this point D. L. Moody used to tell of a child whose mother became very sick. While the mother was sick one of the neighbors took the child away to stay with her until the mother should get well again. But instead of getting well, the mother grew worse and died. The neighbors thought that they would not take the child home until after the funeral was over, and that they would not tell her about her mother being dead. So after a while they simply brought the little girl home. At once she went to find her mother. First she went into the sitting room to find her mother; then she went into the parlor to find her mother. She went from one end of the house to the other, but she could not find her. At last she asked, "Where is my mama?" When they told her that her mama was gone, the child wanted to go back to the neighbor's house again. Home had lost its attraction for her since her mother was not there any longer. Moody writes, "It is not the jasper walls and the pearly gates that are going to make heaven attractive. It is being with God."

To know that we are going to heaven is a wonderful thing. But more wonderful still is the fact that we shall see Jesus and shall be able to express to him that praise and love he deserves for having left heaven to come to earth and here die for us sinners. Of this truth Fanny Crosby once wrote:

Some day the silver cord
will break, And I no
more as now shall sing;
But O, the joy when I shall wake
Within the palace of the King!
And I shall see him face-to-face,
And tell the story—Saved by grace;
And I shall see him face-to-face,
And tell the story—Saved by grace;
Some day my earthly
house will fall— I
cannot tell how soon
'twill be;
But this I know—my
All in All Has now
a place in heav'n for
me.

This expectation of the redeemed child of God is a glorious theme, the reality of which makes heaven a true home for us. Indeed, heaven becomes a proper home only when we have the first priority.

A Reunion

But the point at which we began is not whether or not we will see and recognize Jesus but whether or not we will see and recognize each other. Will we recognize each other? Of course, we will. What is more, there are many indications in Scripture that this will be so.

One very encouraging indication comes from the Old Testament in a phrase often used in connection with the death of the patriarchs. It is the phrase "and he was gathered to his people." It occurs in texts like these:

"Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he *was gathered to his people"* (Gen. 25:8); "Altogether Ishmael lived a hundred and thirty-seven years. He breathed his last and died, and he *was gathered to his people"* (Gen. 25:17); "Then he [Isaac] breathed his last and died and *was gathered to his people*, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him" (Gen. 35:29); "When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and *was gathered to his people"* (Gen. 49:33); "Aaron *will be gathered to his people*. He will not enter the land I give the Israelites" (Num. 20:24); and "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go up this mountain in the Abarim range and see the land I have given the Israelites. After you have seen it, you too *will be gathered to your people*, as your brother Aaron was" (Num. 27:12-13).

Many Old Testament scholars regard the phrase "and he was gathered to his people" as being nothing more than a conventional way of saying that he died. It is to be explained, so they say, by the thought that the individual was being placed in the same graveyard as those who had died before him. But this is hardly satisfactory in the case of the Bible stories involved. When Abraham died he was buried in a cave at Machpelah in the land that was to become Israel, but it was not the burial place of his ancestors. They had been buried back in Ur of the Chaldees, and his father had been buried at Haran. Moreover, in reading the account of his death, it is hard to overlook the fact that Abraham is said to have been gathered to his ancestors in verse 8 of Genesis 25, but to have been buried only in verse 9. Consequently, the phrase "gathered to his people" cannot refer to the burial but must refer to the death itself as a result of which Abraham joined those who had gone before him.

The same thing is true of Moses, who died by himself in the mountain. The Book of Deuteronomy even tells us that "no one knows where his grave is" (Deut. 34:6).

The comment of David upon being told of the death of Bathsheba's child is also important, for it shows that David believed in a personal reunion with departed loved ones in the life to come. God struck the

child so that it became sick and died. While it lay languishing David, who understood that he was to blame, prayed for the child and fasted, lying all night upon the earth. So great was his grief and concern that when the child died, those who were close to David were afraid to tell him lest his grief should know no bounds. David detected the change in their attitude, however. He asked, "Is the child dead?" When they told him that the child had died, David surprised them by rising from his place of mourning, washing himself, dressing, and resuming his duties as leader of the nation.

The servants asked about his change of attitude, since they could not understand it. David explained, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.' But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me" (2 Sam. 12:22-23). This last comment does not mean merely that David would eventually die himself. For the point of the story is that David comforted himself (and Bathsheba) after the child's death, and there would be no comfort unless David believed that, although he could not bring the child back, nevertheless, one day he would see the child again in heaven.

If we turn to the New Testament, we find an additional indication of these same truths in the events that took place on the Mount of Transfiguration. On this occasion the Lord Jesus Christ took three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John, with him into the mountain and was transformed into a form showing his celestial glory. Moreover, Moses and Elijah, two other glorified saints, appeared beside him. Luke calls them "men"; that is, not disembodied spirits, and he reports that Peter and presumably also the others recognized them. Peter said, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah" (Luke 9:33). Here both Moses and Elijah had retained their identities and were recognized by the three disciples.

Christ's story about the rich man and Lazarus makes a similar point, for the Lord told how the rich man went to hell and, being in torment, lifted up his eyes and saw "Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side"

(Luke 16:23). Here is a case that involves recognition of the departed, not only as they appear in this life, but as they appear to each other in the life to come.

Finally, there is a fine text from the lips of Jesus in which he speaks of many Gentiles joining with believing Jews in a great reunion in heaven. We read, "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:11). This is a great promise, but it is not possible unless there is to be a full recognition of all who have died. Clearly the patriarchs are to know each other at this holy reunion, and so will all those who have died in Christ and who will be gathered to the reunion from the far corners of the earth. In that day we may well be surprised to see many in heaven whom we do not expect to be there. And we will be just as surprised not to find many there whom we thought would be present.

Many of us have lost believing loved ones. Or, if we have not lost them and yet live long enough, we will lose them. But we have not lost them ultimately, for they are with Jesus, and we will yet be reunited with them.

All We Are Meant to Be

It has been pointed out, first, that we shall see Jesus and, second, that we shall see and recognize each other. The third point is that we shall see each other, not as we are now or have been but as we are meant to be. This truth is conveyed in the text mentioned earlier, which says that we shall see Christ face to face. It says, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

Until recently, every time I read that verse I focused on the word "we" and read it as if it said "I." I read that "I will be like him" and took comfort in that. But now I am impressed with something else that is also true. It is not only that I shall be made like Jesus. It is that we *all*

shall be like him. As a result, the sin, ignorance, anger, hate, weariness, and perversity that so often mar our relationships now will be eliminated. In that day we will have a fresh view of each other, for we will see each other, not as we have come to know each other here below, in our sin, but rather as we were meant to be.

Moreover, we will see each other rewarded for faithful service in this life, for the Bible speaks of crowns that will be given to those who are faithful. The Lord himself has said, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Rev. 22:12). I am sure that there is a wrong way of thinking of rewards. If we are serving only for what we can get out of the arrangement, we are no more than hirelings. Again, if we are working for rewards in this life—for money or the praise others may (or may not) give us—we are not fit to be Christ's servants. On the other hand, there is a right way to think about rewards, for the prospect of rewards is set before us as one reason why the patriarchs and other biblical characters were faithful. They had much to discourage them. Often there were severe trials, hardships, beatings, pain, and ridicule. But they endured because they were "looking ahead to [their] reward" (Heb. 11:26).

One of our great hymns, written by Heinrich Schenk early in the eighteenth century and translated into English by Francis Cox, speaks of these rewards:

> Who are these like stars appearing, These before God's throne who stand?

Each a golden crown is
wearing; Who are all
this glorious band?
Alleluia! Hark, they sing,
Praising loud their heavenly King.
Who are these of dazzling
brightness, These in God's
own truth arrayed,
Clad in robes of purest whiteness,
Robes whose lustre ne'er
shall fade, Ne'er be touched
by time's rude hand?
Whence come all this
glorious band?
These are they who have
contended For their
Savior's honor long,
Wrestling on till life was ended,
Following not the sinful throng;
These, who well the fight
sustained, Triumph through
the Lamb have gained.

In the day of our heavenly reunion we shall have those rewards, if we are faithful. And we shall rejoice in the triumphs of other Christians. Do you not think, since this will be true, that you could rejoice with them now? We tend to be critical of one another; and, of course, sometimes there are grounds for it. We do sin; we are unfaithful. But by God's grace we are also, at times, faithful, for which we shall be rewarded. If only we could see this, we would regard one another differently. We would rejoice in the triumphs, rather than bemoan the faults. We would pray for one another fervently.

So let us pray and work. Let us do so until the day when the entire ransomed church of God is raised to be with Jesus and is made like him.

Chapter 177.
"I Am the Way and the Truth and the Life"

John 14:5-6

There are many offensive things about Christianity, at least for some people, but the chief offense of Christianity is its founder and his extraordinary claims. It is true that the claims of Jesus of Nazareth often are not spoken of or taken at face value; when that happens it is possible to present Jesus as the lovely, indulgent rabbi who was everyone's friend. But sooner or later his claims about himself become known, and the offense emerges.

Not long ago I was talking with a Hebrew Christian whose work is in Jewish evangelism. He talked about the various approaches being made to Jewish people today, some of which go to great lengths to avoid the offense I have been talking about. He pointed out that in some HebrewChristian organizations the word 'Jesus" is not used. Instead, members of the group speak of *Yeshua* or *ha Mashiach* ("the Messiah"). Moreover, he explained that he had done this recently himself, to a great degree. But then he added, "I have found out that in the end this does not always accomplish a great deal. For whether you speak of *Yeshua* or *ha Mashiach* or the Messiah, eventually, if you are giving a true Christian witness, it is still Jesus you are talking about, and the offense remains."

I found my friend's words interesting, for they expressed in one area what I had already found to be true in others. Eliminate the true Jesus of Nazareth with his exclusive claims, substitute another Jesus, and Christianity will be popular. But preach the true Jesus, and some will inevitably be offended.

A Threefold Solution

Our expository study of John's Gospel has brought us to what is probably the most exclusive (and offensive) of all Christ's sayings. Indeed, it is probably the most exclusive statement ever made by anyone.

This is not to say that Jesus' other sayings, if properly understood, are not also exclusive; for in all his teaching he spoke with a sense of supreme authority and not as the other teachers before him (Matt. 7:29). Still, this saying is one of a number of exclusive claims given special prominence in John's Gospel, and even within this unique body of material it is exceptional. The sayings I am referring to are the "I am" statements of the Gospel, five of which have already been studied in our verse-by-verse exposition. The first was John 6:35—"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." This is a claim to be able to fulfill the deepest spiritual hungers of our race. The next four "I am" sayings were: "I am the light of the world" (8:12; 9:5); "I am the gate" (10:7, 9); "I am the good shepherd" (10:11, 14); "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25). Each of these is a categorical and exclusive saying, as is the one yet to come—"I am the true vine" (15:1, 5). But none is as comprehensive and therefore also as objectionable as the one to which we come now.

In this verse Jesus says categorically, "I am the way and the truth and the life." Then he adds, lest anyone should misunderstand him, "No one comes to the Father except through me" (14:6).

At the same time, we must acknowledge that if these words are true, as Christians believe they are, then, although they are indeed exclusive, they ought not to be offensive, for they are actually what we most need as human beings. They should be received with joy and thanksgiving. Before sin entered the world, Adam and Eve, the first people, enjoyed a threefold privilege in their relation to God. First, they were in communion with God. Second, they knew God and the truth that flowed from him. Third, they possessed spiritual life. However, when they disobeyed God and fell into sin, they lost this privilege. Instead of enjoying communion with God, they experienced alienation from him. Instead of knowing the truth, they fell into falsehood and error. Instead

of possessing life, they began to know death. For God had promised, "When you eat of it [that is, of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you will surely die" (Gen. 2:17).

This is our human condition. We are alienated from God, ignorant of the truth, and condemned to spiritual and eventually physical death. The glory of Christ's claim is in its being a divine answer to our problem on each of these three levels. Instead of alienation, there is "the way" to God. Instead of ignorance and error, there is "the truth." Instead of death, there is "the life." So this text is actually the gospel, the good news of God.

All in Jesus

And it is all in Jesus; for the point of the verse—indeed, we can hardly miss it—is that Jesus is the answer on each of these three levels. This point is also reinforced by the context. As he spoke these words, Jesus was about to be crucified, and his disciples were aware, at least in part, that his soul was troubled about it. They realized that the approximately three-year relationship between them and him was coming to an end.

In their confusion the disciples began to ask questions, four of which occur in the immediate context of Jesus' claim to be the way, the truth, and the life. Peter asked the first one. Jesus had said that he was going away from the disciples; so Peter asked, "Lord, where are you going?" (13:36). A few moments later Thomas asked the question in a slightly different way. "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (14:5). Philip asked, "Lord, show us the Father" (14:8), that is "Won't you give us a theophany?" Finally, the Judas who is usually called Jude demanded, "Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" (14:22). These four questions from four different men all arise out of the same situation and betray the same interests. Moreover, in each case Jesus answers them in virtually the same way. In one sense, he seems not to answer them directly at all. Yet, in another sense, he answers them on a most profound level; in each case he directs the thoughts of the disciples toward himself.

Jesus tells Peter that, although he cannot understand where Jesus is going now, one day he will follow him there. He answers Thomas's question about the way by saying, "I am the way." He tells Philip, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." To Jude's question about how Jesus will show himself to his own disciples, he replies by teaching about the future indwelling of his Spirit within every believer. In each case, Jesus is the answer to the problems involved. Is it alienation from God? He is the way. Is it a need for illumination? He is the truth. Is it death? He is the life.

The Way: Reconciliation

Each of these is important, of course; so each must be taken in its turn. The first to be considered is "the way." A way supposes two points, for it is the path from one point to another. In this case it is the way from man's total ruin in sin to the Father.

What do we mean by man's total ruin in sin, from which we need to be led by Christ to the Father? First, we mean the *guilt of sin.* The problem we deal with is how such sin can be put away. We are sinners in God's sight. God declares it, and our consciences concur with God's judgment. But what shall be done? Reformation will not do; for payment of a future debt can never discharge a past debt, and it is our past especially that haunts us. Some hope simply for God's mercy. But an act of mercy that does not also satisfy the claims of justice is unworthy of the great God of the universe. Besides this, God's mercy is already freely offered in Christ.

What shall be done? How shall sin be removed? The only way is that which God has already revealed in Jesus. God has sent his own Son, made a man, to enter into a covenant union with his people so that he becomes one with them and eligible to bear their sin upon himself. He undertakes to be their substitute, dying in their place, bearing in his own body God's just wrath against sin, and then by his death removing the guilt and punishment of that sin forever. As a result of Christ's death in place of his people, sin has been blotted out as by a thick cloud (Isa. 43:25; 44:22), removed "as far as the east is from the west" (Ps.

103:12), placed behind God's back (Isa. 38:17), cast "into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19). Our sins are forgiven (Col. 2:13) and forgotten (Heb. 10:17). They are gone.

Would you escape from your sin and the guilt that goes with it? Jesus is the way. He is the perfect and only way.

Besides this, Jesus is also the way from *the power of sin* to the Father. This too is our concern; for we do not wish only to be justified, we wish to live a life pleasing to the Father. How is this done? It is done through Jesus and the knowledge of our position in him. Charles Haddon Spurgeon once spoke of this in these words: "Whenever I feel that I have sinned, and desire to overcome that sin for the future, the devil at the same time comes to me and whispers, 'How can you be a pardoned person and accepted with God while you sin in this way?' If I listen to this I drop into despondency, and if I continued in that state I should fall into despair, and should commit sin more frequently than before; but God's grace comes in and says to my soul, 'Thou hast sinned; but did not Jesus come to save sinners? Thou art not saved because thou art righteous; for Christ died for the ungodly.' And my faith says, 'Though I have sinned, I have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and though I am guilty, yet by grace I am saved and I am a child of God still.' And what then? Why, then the tears begin to flow, and I say, 'How could I ever sin against my God who is so good to me? Now I will overcome that sin,' and I get strong to fight with sin through the conviction that I am God's child."

Doubts and fears drive the Christian farther into sin, for they obscure God. Faith in God leads to holiness; for this causes us to stand against sin and go on knowing that the way is forever open for us into God's presence.

The Truth: Illumination

The second of Christ's claims is to be "the truth," especially the truth about the Father, which includes all other truth. He did not say, "I have come to *tell* you the truth about the Father." Nor did he say, "I have

come to point to the truth about the Father." He said, "I *am* the truth." "I and the Father are one," said Jesus (John 10:30). "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

What do we see in Jesus about God the Father? What do we learn about reality? First, that God is *personal.* He is a person. He is not an impersonal force in the universe, a force that has merely set the world in motion or governs it impartially through the abstract laws of matter and motion. The existence of a god like that might explain some scientific phenomena, but it would not explain self-conscious life, such as that possessed by animals or man. God is not impersonal. God is one who, with the full traits of personality, desires to communicate with persons and wants them to know him. Through Jesus, we know that he wants that.

In him we also see that God is *holy.* We cannot learn that God is holy from looking in any other direction. In the world we see both good and evil, order and disorder, and often the two are mingled. In the heavens we see impartiality at best, if not rather cold indifference or hostility. If we were to judge from what we see in the world or in the heavens, we could only conclude that God is amoral or that he does not care about evil. But Jesus is holy. He is without sin. He has declared that God is like himself in his holiness.

Jesus also reveals that God is a God of *mercy.* He is a God of love. So we are told, and indeed we see it demonstrated, that God is not deaf to the cries of mankind. Even while requiring justice, God came to people, willing to die for them, in their place, and thus provide peace, joy, goodness, self-control, and all other blessings of the Christian life. A personal, holy, loving God—that is what Jesus has to tell you about him.

The Life: Regeneration

The third part of Christ's claim is to be "the life"—for all who believe on him, the emancipator from death. On this point, Arthur W. Pink writes: "The whole Bible bears solemn witness to the fact that the

natural man is spiritually lifeless. He walks according to the course of this world; he has no love for the things of God. The fear of God is not upon him, nor has he any concern for His glory. *Self* is the center and circumference of his existence. He is alive to the things of the world, but is *dead* to heavenly things. The one who is out of Christ exists, but he has no spiritual life. When the prodigal son returned from the *far* country the father said, 'This, my son, was *dead,* and is alive again; he was lost, and is found' (Luke 15:24)." Christ can make such persons alive. Indeed, he promises to give life to all who will come to him.

This makes for great encouragement in the living of the Christian life, for if the life Christ gives is God's life, then that life is eternal life. And the Christian can no more perish than can God the Father. This is what is taught in John 3:16, that verse that so many know. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Does it really mean everlasting life? Yes, it does. And in case we are still inclined to doubt it, Jesus adds just a few chapters later, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28).

Will You Come?

Christ came that you might have life. Will you come to him right where you are? You *can* come. You can come *now*. Jesus does not require you to do anything. What could you do, even if you wished to do something? Would you seek to find the way to God and then walk in it? How can you? He is the Way, and he has come to you rather than making you come to him. Would you study to find out the truth before you believe in God? How can you do that? He is the truth; Scripture presents him fully to your eyes. Would you attempt to awaken yourself out of your spiritual lethargy by self-effort? How can you do even that? He is the life you need; he offers himself to you freely.

There is nothing to do, except to receive him by faith. There is nothing to achieve, no improvements to be made, no lessons to learn. Just believe on Jesus. Accept him for what he claims to be—the way to God, the truth about God, the life of God. Jesus did not say, "I am one of an indefinite number of equally valid ways to God, an aspect of truth, or a phase of life." He said, "I am *the* way and *the* truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me."

Chapter 178.
The Only Way Home

John 14:6

The exclusive claim of the Lord Jesus Christ to be "the way and the truth and the life" is wrapped up in three phrases. He claims to be the way to God, indeed, the only way; he claims to be the truth about God, himself the truth; and he claims to be spiritual life, not merely the way to life. We would think, as we read that phrase, that it has said all that needs to be said. Yet, as we read the Lord's own words, we find that immediately after saying, "I am the way and the truth and the life," he says the whole thing over again in different words, lest we misunderstand it. He says, "No one comes to the Father except through me." If the Lord stated this a second time, lest we misunderstand it, then we should look at it a second time also.

Only through Jesus

Taken together, these phrases mean that Christianity makes an exclusive claim. People sometimes suggest that we are narrow-minded as Christians when we say that Christ is the only way to God, and we have to confess that this is precisely what we are at this point. We are as narrow as the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord said—this is the emphasis of the verse—that he is the only way to God. There is no other way. So while it would be nice for us to equivocate on this point and say, in order to win friends and influence people, that other ways have some

value— though we would like to say this, we are nevertheless unable to do so. Rather, we find ourselves affirming with the Lord Jesus Christ and with all the biblical writers that there is no salvation apart from Jesus.

Many verses teach it: 1 Corinthians 3:11—"No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ"; Acts 4:12—"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men, by which we must be saved"; 1 Timothy 2:5—"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

If you are one who is rejecting all this, if you are one who perhaps is interested in Christianity but not exclusively, if you think that perhaps Jesus Christ is *a* way to God but not *the* way to God, I want to stress that, according to his teaching, he is the only way and that any attempt to find another way is folly, is bound to produce despair, and is perverse. The tragedy is that apart from the grace of God folly, despair, and perversity characterize each one of us. We are fools because we seek another way. We despair because there is no other way to be found. We are perverse because God has told us that there is only one way. Therefore, in turning from him to try to find another way we dishonor him.

The Fool Has Said

First, there is the folly of trying to find another way. Why is it folly? It is folly because, if a way to God has been provided, it is nonsense to look for another. Who would seek for a second cure for cancer if a perfect cure had been found?

Yet this is the folly of the human heart in spiritual things. Jesus told about it in a parable that concerned a rich man. This man thought the way to life was through material possessions, so he spent a lifetime accumulating worldly goods. He was a farmer. He had produce. His wealth was in the storage of his barn. When the barn became too small for what he was accumulating, he said, "I'll tear down my old barn and

build a bigger one that can hold my possessions." The Lord's comment on that man's life was: "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" (Luke 12:20).

It is not the preacher who calls the unbeliever a fool. If that were the case, it would mean little indeed. The unbeliever could simply say to the preacher, 'You are the fool for believing as you do." No, God is the one who calls men fools, fools for refusing to come to him in the way he has provided.

If we explore a bit deeper to find out why this is so, we find that it is because we are determined to provide for ourselves. During World War II, my father served as a doctor in the air force in the southern part of the United States. When he was released from military service he and the family began to drive northward to the family home in western Pennsylvania. It was only a few days before Christmas. So it was no surprise that on the way we ran into an early blizzard in the mountains of Tennessee. The storm got worse and worse and eventually halted our progress. At one point, however, before we had stopped for the night and as we were going uphill in a little mountain area with a dangerous precipice at our right, a car up ahead stopped. My father realized that, if the car ahead stopped, he would have to stop and, if he stopped, he would immediately begin to slide over the precipice. So he grabbed a blanket, jumped out of the car, ran around to the back wheels and stuck the blanket under one of them to stop our descent. We were stopped. But there we were, stranded in the blizzard on the mountainside.

My father was an Irishman, and at this point two things characterized him: first, pride in his achievement and, second, determination to bring off another. He had saved us from going over the precipice. Now he was going to get us up the mountain. So he began to work, shoveling snow and placing boards and blankets under the tires. He worked for about an hour, but without much success. All the time my two sisters and I, my mother, and my aunt were in the car, getting colder and colder. We were very depressed. Suddenly a truck with wonderful traction came by. This truck moved ahead of us and stopped. It was obvious that the driver

knew he could get going again. He got out, came back to my father and said, "I have a chain. Would you like me to hitch onto your car and take you up the mountain?"

Do you know what my father said? He said, "No, thanks. We're doing fine." And he did do fine! But it was about sixty cold and gloomy minutes later!

God says that we are exactly like this spiritually, except for the fact that it does not matter whether we spend an hour, two hours, a year, or a lifetime. We are never going to get ourselves going up the road to salvation. So Jesus says, "Look, I've come to provide the way to salvation. I am the way. Don't be so foolish that you turn your back on me out of pride."

No Exit

Second, you are not only foolish, you are also on a trip to despair. If Jesus is right when he says, "I am the way... no one comes to the Father except through me," then no other way can be found. The Father is the source of all spiritual blessings. The way to the Father is through Jesus. If you are trying to find another way, you are never going to get those spiritual blessings. To go in any other way is to embark upon a road that has no exits and no destination.

Paul spells it out in the Book of Romans, pointing to the different ways men and women try to reach God. There are three categories. First, there is the way of *natural theology.* This is the way of the man who goes out into the field at night and says, "I am going to commune with God in nature." It is the man who says, "I worship God on Sunday afternoon in my golf cart." Paul says that this is a dead end, because you cannot find God in nature. No man has ever found God in nature. You can find things about God in nature, but these condemn you.

Romans says that nature reveals two things about God. It reveals the "Godhead" of God, that is, his existence, and it reveals his "power," because obviously something or someone of considerable power stands behind what we observe. That is all that can be known of God in nature. So if you think you are going to find God in nature, you are destined to

emptiness in your search. You cannot worship an eternal power; you cannot worship a supreme being; you cannot worship a law of nature. Moreover, says Paul, "You don't even try!" Because when you say to yourself, "I'm going to worship God in nature," what you are really doing is using nature as an excuse to avoid God. Actually you do not want to be with Christian people, nor do you wish to be under the preaching of the Word. You find it disturbing. What you are really trying to do is to escape from God into nature. If you worship anything at all, it is nature you worship; and the worship of nature is idolatry.

Some years ago, after I had given a message along these lines, a woman said, "I found that to be true in my work with the beach crowd in California."

I asked, "What do you mean?"

"Well," she said, "we used to have meetings on the beach, and I used to witness to the surfers. When I would speak to them about God, they would reply that they worshiped God in nature. At first I didn't know what to say, but after a while I caught on. I learned to ask, 'And what is God?' They would reply, 'My surfboard is my god.'" At least that is honest, but it is paganism and idolatry.

Second, there are people who try to find God in the way of human *morality.* They say, "God certainly likes good men and women; therefore, I'll be good, and I'll get to him that way." Paul says that this line will lead you to despair also. Why? We see the answer when we reason as follows. If God loves good people—and it is true that he does—how good do they have to be? The answer is that they have to be absolutely good, perfect, because God can settle for nothing less. But no one is perfect. So Paul says, "When you start like that, when you start thinking that you are going to please God by getting better and better, you fail to see that even if you could achieve the maximum goodness possible to anyone in this world, you would never get to God in that way because it would not be good enough.

We have a strange situation in the church today. The church has a message to proclaim; it begins with the total depravity of man. But this is offensive to most people. So the church gets cold feet at this point—ministers do, of course—and it backs off from preaching these things. Ministers say, "We admit that the Bible does say that all are sinners; it does say that all are dead in trespasses and sins; but it does not really mean that. It is hyperbole. What it really means is that we just need a little help. People are really pretty good underneath. So if we just appeal to their natural goodness, they'll come and be Christians. Besides, they'll join our churches and give us money."

Does the world congratulate the church for congratulating the world? Not at all! The world knows that this is not true. So you have people like Jean Paul Sartre and other existentialists leaping to their feet to say, "If the church is not going to tell the truth, we are going to tell the truth! We know that when you scratch beneath the veneer of mankind, when you get rid of the social conventions, when you get rid of the desire to be acceptable with other people by matching up to certain preestablished patterns of behavior, what you find beneath the surface is garbage. You find a sewer of corruption." The existentialist does not have the answer. The despair of the existentialist is proof of what lies at the end of his road. But at least he speaks out; he is not silent.

Then, in Romans 2:17-29, Paul says that there is a third way that people try; it is the way of *religion*, a sort of formalism. This person says, "If I cannot be righteous, at least I can do things that God likes. I'll be baptized. I'll be confirmed. I'll go to communion." Paul says that this leads to despair also. Why? Because it is based on a false conception of God. It suggests that God will settle for externals. Does he? No! People may settle for externals, but not God; he looks on the heart. God sees that although you can go through the rite of baptism, it does not mean a thing if your heart is not cleansed. He sees that although you may come to communion, it does not mean a thing unless you have first fed on Jesus Christ by faith and have drunk at that stream that he provides.

An Insult to God

To say that one is a fool for looking in another direction than Christ sounds insulting. To say that it leads to despair sounds grim. But there is worse to come. For seeking a way other than Jesus is not only foolish and leads to despair, it is perverse. It is insulting to God. How is it insulting? It is insulting because Jesus *said,* "I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me." So if you go another way, it is not merely that you are doing something for yourself, and it is certainly not the case that you are doing something praiseworthy. What you are really doing is saying to the Lord Jesus Christ, "Lord Jesus Christ, you are a liar!"

Do you think that God is going to be proud of you for trying to find your own way? Do you think that God is going to admire you for that, love you for that, praise you for that? God is going to regard this for what it is, an insult to the Lord Jesus Christ his Son, because that is the equivalent of saying, 'You, Lord Jesus Christ, you in whom the Father is well pleased, cannot be trusted."

Furthermore, to seek another way is not only an insult to Christ, it is an insult to the love of God who planned the way of salvation out of his great love for the sinner. What the Lord Jesus Christ did was in fulfillment of the desires of his Father. He said, "I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do your will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). It was God's will that Jesus Christ, his Son, should die in your place. So it is an insult to God to ignore it. Do you think that it was easy for God to send Jesus Christ to die for you? I am asking you fathers: Would it be easy for you to give up your son or your daughter, to see that son or daughter killed, in order that someone else might be saved? I ask you mothers: Would it be easy for you to have a son or daughter killed in your sight, to turn your back when you could save that son or daughter, in order to have someone else saved? Of course not! You who are brothers: Would you give up a sister? You who are sisters: Would you give up a brother? If it is not easy for you, why should you think that it would be easy for God? Yet that is what God did for you.

Do you think it was easy for the Lord Jesus Christ to stand with his disciples on the verge of his crucifixion and say, "I am the way"? He

knew what it meant to be the way. It meant that he had to go to the cross; he had to die; he had to suffer; he had to have the Father turn his back on him while he was made sin for us; he had to have the wrath of God poured out upon him. That is what it meant when the Lord Jesus Christ said, "I am the way... no one comes to the Father except through me." Yet he said it.

Come ... Come

So I ask: Is it anything but sinful, obstinate perversity for someone to say, 'That is all very nice, but I am going to go another way"? To go another way is to condemn yourself to hell! For there is no other way. 'There is one God and *one* mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

How foolish it would be, how much despair is involved, how perverse on your part to go away, saying, "Well, that is all very interesting, of course; but I'm going to look a bit farther." *Today* is the day of salvation! This may be the last opportunity you will ever have! I cannot promise that you will ever hear the gospel again. I cannot promise that the Holy Spirit will ever speak to your heart again, if he is speaking at this moment. Heed the invitation and come! The Bible says, "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Rev. 22:17).

Chapter 179.
How to See God

John 14:7-11

An the fourteenth chapter of John's Gospel, in the midst of the last discourses, one of Christ's disciples makes a request with which most Christian people can identify. The disciple was Philip. The request he made was, "Lord, show us the Father." It was the request to see God.

There are times when each of us earnestly wishes that the experience Philip asked of the Lord
Jesus Christ could be possible. We know, of course, that God does not possess a tangible form. We even know that this is only what we ought to expect and that it is desirable. But still there are times when God seems so remote, so untouchable, that we earnestly wish we could see him. We would like to gaze upon God and hear his voice in words that actually strike our eardrums. In such moments we believe that if we could have this experience, then we should find it easier to live for God in the midst of this world. And—we must be honest here—we sometimes imagine that God is holding out on us, making it more difficult for us by denying this experience. Have you ever had these thoughts? If you have, then the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to Philip in the upper room should be of great interest to you.

Knowing God

We must notice, however, before we begin to look at Christ's answer, that Philip's question arose in the context of Christ's teaching about knowing God, so that in this case Jesus actually provoked his disciple's question. A moment before Jesus had taught that he was the sole way to God. "No one comes to the Father except through me," he said. Then he went on, "If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him" (v. 7). What do you think of that statement? Do you think that it is easily comprehensible? Do you grasp its meaning at once? This statement makes one stop and ponder. However, if it does that for us now, at this point in history, I am convinced that it most certainly had that effect upon the disciples and was therefore spoken by Jesus precisely for that purpose.

In other words, it is apparent from the nature of the statement, and the context, that Jesus spoke as he did in order to provoke a discussion on this subject. He was about to leave his disciples. He
knew that when he should be taken from them they would be plunged into a dark and melancholy despair. In their despair God would seem

extremely remote. Consequently, he introduced the subject in order to teach them that they had already seen God and were therefore to know him from this time forward, whether they realized it or not.

"From now on, you do know him and have seen him," he said. Philip fixed his thoughts upon the idea of seeing, as we often do, and demanded, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us" (v. 8).

Limitations of Seeing

As Philip asked this question he was probably thinking of those Old Testament examples in which a person or group of persons is said to have seen God. Moses was one. He had asked to see God's glory, and God had replied, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence" (Exod. 33:19). Then the Lord placed Moses within a cleft of rock, covered the space with his hand, and passed by. Elijah had a similar experience when the Lord caused a great wind, an earthquake, and a fire to pass before his prophet, though the Lord was not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire. He was in the still small voice that Elijah heard afterward (1 Kings 19:11-12). There is also a verse that tells us that Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel "saw the God of Israel.
Under his feet was something like a pavement of sapphire, clear as the sky itself" (Exod. 24:10).

None of these passages mean that the persons involved actually saw God as he is in himself. God had told Moses, "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Exod. 33:20). Still, the experience of the others was something great, and this was good enough for Philip, whatever it was. He therefore asked Jesus, whom he believed could do anything, for a theophany.

But how did the Lord reply? Instead of granting the request or even attempting to explain why Philip's desire was unwise or impossible, Jesus began to teach what it really means to see God, and how to see

him. The point with which he began was the limitation of the kind of seeing Philip had in mind.

To understand this point we need to see the contrast implied in Christ's next statement. Philip had said, "Lord, we would *know* God if we could just *see him.*" But Jesus says, making the contrast, "It is strange that you say that, Philip. For I have been with you three years. You have seen me throughout that period, and yet you do not know me. Why then do you think that seeing would help you know God?" This is the meaning of the statement, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?" (v. 9). Obviously, the kind of seeing that Philip had in mind does not lead to a true knowledge of anyone.

A Right Kind of Seeing

The Lord Jesus Christ did not stress merely the limitations of the kind of seeing Philip envisioned, however. He also talked about the right kind of seeing, a seeing centered entirely in himself. He is the object of it. Jesus continued, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? (v. 9). True, there is a seeing that is inadequate. But, on the other hand, there is a seeing that is altogether right. In this seeing, the sequence is obviously: (1) seeing the Lord Jesus Christ with understanding, (2) coming to know Jesus as a result of that seeing, and (3) coming to know God through knowing Jesus.

But what kind of seeing is this? The seeing involved is illustrated by the story of Peter and John's trip to the tomb of Jesus, recorded just six chapters farther on in John's Gospel. In that story three different words are used for "seeing," though each is translated by the identical word "see" in our Bibles. The first is *blepō*. It is used of John who, having outdistanced Peter in the race to the tomb, stooped down "and looking in, *saw* the linen clothes lying." This is the simplest word for "see." It merely means that the image of the graveclothes within the tomb had impressed itself upon the retina of John's eyes. In a few moments Peter arrived. Since he was not one to stand around doing nothing, Peter pushed John aside and actually entered the tomb. Here he had opportunity to observe the graveclothes; so, in this case, a different

word for "see" is used. The word is *theōreō*. It means to "puzzle over" or "scrutinize." In this case, Peter needed to puzzle over the fact that the clothes were there but the body was gone. If the body had been taken away, why were the graveclothes not taken away with it? Or, on the other hand, if the bands had been removed, why were they not scattered about the tomb and the spices spilled? Instead of this, the bands were exactly as they had been when they were wound around the body, and the head cloth was set off by itself just as it had been when it was around the head of the Master. At this point John tells us that he entered, saw what Peter saw, and believed. Only now the word is not *theōreō* or *blepō*. It is *oraō*, which means "to see with understanding." That is why John says that he "saw and believed." He saw that the only thing that would account for the arrangement of the graveclothes was a resurrection.

That is precisely the word used in John 14, where Jesus says that the one who has "seen" him has "seen" the Father. He means that the one who perceives who he is perceives God.

The point can be made in another way also. Notice that Philip had asked to be "shown" the Father. This is the verb *deiknumi*, which, in effect, calls for a demonstration. Jesus replied that what was needed was not so much a demonstration as an apprehension. It is not a seeing but a perceiving that is important.

This has great bearing for us, of course, for if seeing physically is the important thing, we are deprived. Not only can we not see God; we cannot even see Jesus, which was at least Philip's privilege. Jesus is simply not here. We cannot observe him. On the other hand, if perceiving is the true seeing, then we are not deprived at all, for we can perceive Jesus and, perceiving him, can perceive and know God. Indeed, we can know him as well and in exactly the same way as he was known by these believing contemporaries of the Lord Jesus.

Believing Is Seeing

To speak of the Lord's "believing contemporaries" leads us to the final section of these verses, for it can hardly escape the notice of any careful reader that the discussion of knowing and seeing, which fills the first half of the paragraph, gives way to a discussion of belief (or faith) in the second. In the first half, the word "know" occurs four times and the words "seen" or "show" five times. In the second half (including verse 12), not one of these three words can be found.
But the word "believe," "believed," or "believes" is repeated four times over.

Why? It is no great mystery. It is merely another example of the New Testament teaching that in spiritual things belief must come first, after which true seeing will follow. Earlier in the Gospel, Jesus had said of the people of his day, "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe" (4:48). This was a true description of the thinking of vast numbers of men and women in his time, as we pointed out when we studied that verse. It is the old philosophy, "Seeing is believing," upon which the world operates. But Jesus inverts it. On the occasion on which the words I have just quoted were spoken, Jesus instructed a nobleman, who had come to him for the healing of his child, "You may go. Your son will live" (v. 50), as a result of which the nobleman believed and then saw the thing he had requested. In the same way, in chapter 11, just before he is to raise Lazarus from the dead, Jesus turns to unbelieving Martha and asks, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" (v. 40).

If this is only a human matter, the suggestion that we should believe without sight is absurd. Who wants to believe without sight? No one. And no one does. On the other hand, in spiritual matters it is entirely reasonable to do this, because in this case we are dealing not with a mere man but with God. Jesus is God. To believe him is the most logical act in the universe.

Faith's Object

The matter of seeing God stops with believing on Jesus, but we are not to suppose by this that belief is therefore some subjective, intangible

thing, as if we are to work ourselves up to faith by wishful thinking. This is not the biblical idea at all. Consequently, Jesus goes on to talk about belief in two things or, as we might also say, on two levels. The first level is belief in his words; the second is belief in his works. In other words, belief is as objective and tangible as the words and works of Jesus. Jesus does not call for blind faith. He calls for a thinking faith. He here challenges faith by asking us to test his claims on the basis of the things said and the deeds done.

Have you tested Christ's words? In one of his writings Charles Haddon Spurgeon tells of an old unbeliever who was dying. A great Scotch preacher by the name of Innis, came to see him. He inquired of his faith in Christ and was told, "Mr. Innis, I am relying solely on the mercy of God; God is merciful, and he will never condemn a man forever." When he became worse and was nearer death, Mr. Innis went to him again. This time the man said, "Oh, Mr. Innis, my hope is gone; for I have been thinking that if God is merciful, God is just too; and what if, instead of being merciful to me, he should be just to me? What would then become of me? I must give up my hope in the mere mercy of God; tell me how to be saved." The minister then told him of Christ's words and deeds. He told him how Christ had come into the world to save sinners. He told him how he had promised to do this by going to the cross to die in their place, how this had been done, and how Jesus had promised that none of those who had been given to him by the Father should ever be lost. "Ah," said the infidel, "Mr. Innis, there is something solid in that; I can rest on that. I have found that I cannot rest on anything else." There is nothing else. Belief is meaningless unless it rests on the words and works of Jesus.

Little Faith

But perhaps even now you feel that your faith is too small and that you will therefore never come to see God. If this is the case, notice that before he moves on to other subjects Jesus stops to say a word just to you. You may not be able to believe on the basis of his teaching alone, he argues. But you can surely believe on the basis of what he has done.

"Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves" (v. 11). To believe on the basis of the miracles is not the best kind of faith, but it is true faith regardless. It is better than no faith at all.

Better than thinking about faith itself is to think on faith's object.

Some time ago I came upon this illustration from the works of Donald Barnhouse. Barnhouse had been in Palestine and had been taken to the great hall of the Sanhedrin. In that hall there is a window which looks out over the wailing wall, at the base of which stand groups of rabbis, slowly beating their breasts in sorrow for sin while repeating phrases from the Book of Lamentations. As Barnhouse looked he saw that above their heads, along the high expanse of the wall, grew the long trailing plant identified as the hyssop of the Bible.

Barnhouse asked about the plant and learned that it has a remarkably shallow root. Often it is not over a half-inch long. But with this root the hyssop clings to the surface of the rock, drawing its sustenance from the air, wind, rain (when there is any), and small particles of nourishment in the rock itself. From that tiny root the plant flourishes, sometimes growing to a length of twelve or fourteen feet. "What a great plant to grow from such a slender root," thought Barnhouse. What a symbol of the faith God calls for!

In itself faith is worthless, just as worthless as the root if it should become unattached. If one grasps the branch and pulls the root away from the rock, the branch will soon die. To be of value the root must cling to the rock. Thus, faith, which is nothing in itself, becomes the key to life when it clings to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Rock of Ages. It is through faith in him that we see God.

Chapter 180.
Greater Things Than Jesus' Things

John 14:12

It is unlikely that any of us has ever been offered a million dollars. But if we can imagine how breathlessly overwhelmed we would be by such an offer, we can begin to appreciate what our reaction should be to the promise of Jesus in John 14:12.

Jesus has been attempting to comfort his disciples, for they were distressed and dispirited at the announcement that he was going away from them. He had promised that he was going to prepare a home for them in heaven and that he was going to return for them so that they could be with him. Then, after dealing with a question raised by Philip, he added solemnly, but obviously also to provide comfort, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father."

Greater works than Jesus' works! That is the promise. But when we think of it the promise seems unrealistic, if not totally incredible. Jesus had healed the sick, calmed the troubled sea of Galilee, fed thousands with a few small loaves of bread and several fishes, raised the dead. These were great works, probably the greatest miracles we can imagine! We cannot do them. But if that is the case, how could Jesus have said what he did say?

What Kind of Works?

There are only two approaches to this verse other than saying that Jesus was simply mistaken. The first takes it as referring to miracles but then either limits the reference or seeks to explain why such miracles are not done today. The second refers it to a different work entirely.

Some who take the verse as referring to miracles find a supposed qualification in the word "faith." The promise is only for those who have faith in Jesus, such interpreters say.
Consequently, since no one does such works today (at least no one we know), we clearly do not believe enough. Our faith is lacking. It is

enough to reply to this viewpoint that since we are to do greater works than Jesus' works, it would be necessary for us, according to this interpretation, to have greater faith than his, which is clearly impossible. Besides, Jesus does not say, "Anyone who has faith in me with a sufficient degree of faith" or even "Anyone who has intense faith." He merely says, "Anyone who has faith in me," and that would include not just the strong in faith, but any Christian.

Others recognize these truths but seek to limit the verse by applying it to the apostles only. They did miracles. Consequently, this was a fulfillment. Arther W. Pink is one who apparently holds this view, at least as regards the first half of the verse. He writes, "Some have understood this to refer to *all* the genuine followers of Christ. But this is manifestly wrong, for there is *no* Christian on earth today who can do the miracles which Christ did—cleanse the leper, give sight to the blind, raise the dead.... We submit that 'He that believeth on me,' like the expression 'them that believe' in Mark 16:17, of whom it was said certain miraculous signs should follow them, refers to a *particular* class of persons, and that these expressions must be modified by their reference and setting." Pink shows that the verse was fulfilled in the early miracles performed by the apostles, as Hebrews 2:4 seems to indicate—"God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."

This may be part of the story. But one may wonder, even then, if the disciples for all their miracles may be said to have matched, let alone exceeded, Jesus' miracles. If this is a valid objection, the answer should be sought in a different direction entirely.

Spiritual Works

Here we are helped by the knowledge that God does not look at things as we do and, therefore, certainly does not share our view of what constitutes greatness. Why, for instance, should the physical miracles be considered "great" at all? Why should this be the thing Jesus refers to? One clue that it is not comes from Luke 10, in a passage that gives Christ's response to the disciples after they had returned from their first

successful preaching mission. They had returned, we are told, "with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name'" (v. 17). In other words, they were thrilled that they had been able to cast out devils. But Jesus replied, "I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to oversome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (vv. 19-20).

Here Jesus explicitly weighed the value of physical miracles over against the value of having passed out of spiritual death into salvation and chose the spiritual miracle without hesitation. If that is so in Luke 10, why should it not be so also in our text from the last discourses?

Leon Morris is one who sees the verse in this light: "What Jesus means we may see in the narratives of the Acts. There are a few miracles of healing, but the emphasis is on the mighty works of conversion." H. A. Ironside concurs: "He was not speaking of miracles. His chief work was not performing miracles but revealing the Father, bringing knowledge of the Father. It was that of which He was speaking. As a result of His three-and-a-half years of ministry, when He left this scene He said good-bye to a group of about five hundred disciples. There were, doubtless, a few more scattered about but not very many. Very few saw in Him the revelation of the Father. But go on a few days—fifty days later. Ah, then Peter and the rest of the eleven stand up on the day of Pentecost and the third Person of the Trinity comes upon them in power and they are prepared to witness for Him. They preached a crucified and risen Christ, and what happened? Three thousand believed! Probably more in that one day than in all the three-and-ahalf years of our Lord's ministry.... When you realize that when Jesus left this scene, committing His gospel to a little group of eleven men in order that they might carry it to the ends of the earth, at that time the whole world, with the exception of a few in Israel, was lost in the darkness of heathenism. But in three hundred years Christianity closed nearly all the temples of the heathen Roman Empire, and numbered its converts by millions. These were the greater works, and down through the centuries He still carries on this ministry. " Let us summarize what this verse means:

1. The works Christ refers to are spiritual works, primarily the work of regeneration that takes place when the gospel is proclaimed through the power of God's Holy Spirit. This is suggested by two characteristics: first, that the word "things" rather than "signs" or "miracles" is used, and second, that in the phrase "and greater things than these shall he do" the word "things" does not actually occur. There is no word at that point, so the literal translation would simply be "and greater." The point is that Christians will do something greater even than the works of Jesus.

2. The reference in the verse is to every Christian, for this is the only possible meaning of the phrase "Anyone who has faith in me." This does not mean that every Christian will have the ability to be a great evangelist. There is a diversity of gifts. But it does mean that a testimony that leads to the conversion of any individual is greater, in the Lord's sight, than any physical miracle and that the combined efforts of all God's people, leading to the conversion of millions, is tremendous.

3. Finally, there may also be a sense in which the verse applies to all works of compassion, healing, and progress, which, although not miraculous in a supernatural sense, nevertheless in a nearly miraculous way have followed almost inevitably upon the preaching of the gospel.

4. # The Conditions

The promise of Jesus in John 14:12 is a great promise. It is a thrilling promise, if only because it applies to each one of us personally. Great works! Greater works than Jesus' works! We shall do these, if we are Christ's disciples. And yet, we must not get carried away, for as we look at the text more closely we discover that there are four conditions to actually enjoying Christ's promise.

First, we must *have faith in Jesus.* This is found in John 14:12 itself, for Jesus begins the sentence by saying, "Anyone who has faith in me." That is as much as to say, "If anyone will believe in me" or "What I

have to say now is for my followers." Do you believe on Jesus? I do not mean, "Do you believe that he existed?" I do not even mean, "Do you believe that he is who he claimed to be; namely, the Son of God and the world's Savior?" I mean, Is he *your* Savior? Have *you* trusted him as such? Have you let go trusting in your own strength, particularly in spiritual things, and have you allowed him to be your Savior from sin and your Lord? Without the fulfillment of this previous condition, none of the promises mentioned are for anyone.

Second, we must *pray.* This is the first of three additional themes discussed in the next verses (vv. 13-18), all of which are important. The verses on prayer are themselves a great promise: "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (vv. 13-14). Obviously, praying is itself a condition for doing the mighty works that Jesus talks about earlier. Unfortunately, many of us are like those spoken of in James, who, we are told, "do not have, because they do not ask" (4:2).

Do you ask God specifically to see those you know and for whom you are concerned converted? I do not mean, Do you pray generally? I mean, Do you pray specifically and expect God to answer you? R. A. Torrey tells of one case that could be repeated a thousand times over. One Sunday the mother of the most difficult boy he had ever known came up to him after the service and said, "Do you know_____(calling her boy by name)?" Torrey replied, "Yes, I know him." Indeed, everyone knew him.

'You know he is not a very good boy," said the mother.

"Yes," Torrey answered, "I know he is not a very good boy." That, of course, was a decidedly euphemistic way of putting it; in point of fact, he was the terror of the neighborhood.

This heavyhearted mother then said, "What shall I do?"

Torrey replied, "Have you ever tried prayer?"

"Why," she said, "of course I pray."

"No," said Torrey, "I don't mean that. I mean have you ever asked God definitely to regenerate your boy and have you expected him to do it?" "I do not think I have ever been as definite as that."

"Well," said the preacher, "you go right home and be just as definite as that." Torrey then reports that she did go home and was just as definite as that, and that it was probably from that very day, certainly from that week, that the boy was transformed and began to grow up into a fine young man.

We need not believe—we must be honest here—that in every case the prayers we make will have such immediate and striking results. Obviously many do not. On the other hand, we can believe that any prayer that is truly inspired by Christ and in the name of Christ will be answered. The point, however, is not in the time God chooses to take in answering our prayers, but simply that we are to pray. The "greater things" are for those who, first, have believed on Christ, and second, pray.

Third, they are for those whose lives are marked by *a love for Christ expressed in obedience*. This can be seen in the verse that says, "If you love me, you will obey my commands" (v. 15). It is interesting that these two things go together—love for Christ and keeping his commands—and it is clear why this is so. If we do not keep Christ's commands, we cannot really say that we love him; for what we call love is mere sentimentality and affection.

Some time ago I heard a missionary to Nepal talk about spiritual motivation. His name was Thomas Hale, and he and his wife were serving in the remote village of Amp Pipal, about one hundred miles from Kathmandu. He had shown slides of his work, including beautiful panoramas of the surrounding mountains, the fabled Hindu Kush. There were spectacular shots of Mt. Everest. But then the slides were turned off, and he turned to the group and said quietly, "Those are beautiful views, but you must remember that they are taken during the mere ten percent of the time when the mountains are not covered by clouds. Nor

do they show the cold, poverty, dirt or disease. Beauty like that will take you to Nepal. But only love for Christ and obedience to his command to evangelize the world will keep you there." He was right. If we are to do great works for Christ, we must have a fervent love for Christ; and we must determine to keep his commandments.

Finally, we must be *empowered by Christ's own Spirit*, the Holy Spirit. This is spoken of in verses 16 and 17, in which Christ says, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."

In one sense, the presence of Christ's Spirit is involved in all we have been speaking of previously, for we cannot believe without the Spirit. We cannot pray without the Spirit. We cannot love or obey without the Spirit. In another sense, however, this is also a separate point, for in mentioning it, Jesus reminds us that we can do nothing without him. Earlier he had said, 'The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work" (v. 10). Now it is as if we should say, echoing his teaching, "The words that we speak to you, we do not speak on our own; but the Spirit who dwells in us does the work." Can we say that? It is certain that we will never do the works that Jesus has for us to do until we can.

Words of Jesus

Do you hear Jesus speaking? Do you hear him calling you? He is saying, "I know that you are often discouraged. I know that the world seems harsh and unresponsive to the gospel. But remember this: I have ascended to the right hand of my Father in heaven, from which place I now rule. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me; and it is on this basis, the basis of my authority, and in my strength that I send you forth to be my disciples. I am Lord over sin, death, hell, and the devil. You shall be lords over these forces also.

"When I was here on earth, I was in weakness. I performed only a few and very small works: I healed the sick, fed the hungry, raised the dead. Finally I let myself be crucified and put to death. Now I am the risen Lord, and it is my pleasure to do greater works than those I have mentioned. I want to do them through you. I have promised to draw people to myself as the gospel is preached. I call you to preach it. I commission you to go into all the world and teach people all that I have commanded you. I promise to go with you, to bless the message, and to overthrow strongholds of wickedness through your proclamation. You, Peter; you, James; John (George, Mary, Susan, Robert—whoever you may be), I promise to bless your witness to the extent that those who hear your message will either have to accept it or else, by rejecting it, complete their own spiritual destruction."

What do you say to that commission? Do not say, "Well, that is nice; but, of course, the Lord doesn't really mean it. There is nothing I can do." Rather say, 'Then so be it; I am nothing, but by the grace of God I will do all things, through the strength of my Lord."

Chapter 181.
Praying in Jesus' Name

John 14:13-14

It is probably impossible to have a greater promise by the Lord Jesus Christ than that recorded in John 14:12, the verse we looked at in our last study: "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." But if there was a promise that could be considered greater, it would probably be the one that follows immediately afterward: "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it" (vv. 13-14).

This promise was given to the disciples as one part of Jesus' attempt to comfort them in view of his pending departure. He was going to be taken from them. So he promises, first, that his going will not mean the end of his work on earth—they will continue it (v. 12)—and, second, that it will not mean the end of the communion they have enjoyed with him (vv. 13-14). He will be in heaven and they on earth. But prayer will remove all sense of distance and, indeed, be the key for their doing the "greater things" he promised.

There is comfort in this verse then, but it is not really comfort that makes the verse so striking or, as in the preceding promise, that so nearly takes our breath away. What is most striking is the scope of the promise, for it is not merely that those to whom he was speaking should have the privilege of prayer, nor even that he would hear their prayers and from time to time grant what they should ask. It is that Jesus would hear their prayers and grant their requests always.

There is an idea in vogue today, as Torrey points out in his book entitled *The Power of Prayer and the Prayer of Power,* that prayer does not mean that we are to get what we ask but that it is nevertheless good somehow. That is, we may not get our requests, but we will get something— something just as good as that for which we ask, and perhaps even better. It is no doubt true that many of us do not get what we pray for; for we pray foolishly and selfishly, and God often does not grant what we ask. It is good that he does not, for we would bring many troubles on ourselves if all our requests were granted. At the same time, however, we have to say that this view is not the doctrine of prayer taught in the Bible, nor, to be specific, is it the doctrine of prayer taught here. The doctrine of prayer, according to the Bible, is that "there are certain people who can pray in a certain way and who will get not merely some good thing, or something just as good as what they ask, or something even better than what they ask, but *they will get the very thing that they ask for."* It is the promise that if these will ask *anything* in the name of Jesus, they will have it.

"In My Name"

We realize as we say this that there are certain conditions to be met, and the first of these is obviously contained in the words "in my name" or, as we must understand it, "in the name of Jesus." What does this mean? What does it mean to ask something of God in Jesus' name?

It means several things. The first thing it means is that we come to God as those who are identified with Jesus by faith, that is, as Christians. This is very important, for we must begin any teaching about prayer or any study of prayer by realizing that prayer is for Christians only. This is clear from these verses in two ways: (1) the word "you," which refers, not to the world generally, but to the disciples and to those who should follow them in faith; and (2) the phrase "anyone who has faith in me," found just one verse earlier. These phrases limit the verses to Christians. Besides, as we must note, the Bible never promises that God will hear and answer a non-Christian's prayer.

We should add at this point, however, that God sometimes does answer the prayer of a nonChristian. This is what the old Puritan theologians called God's "uncovenanted blessings." But God does not promise to do so. He may hear an unbelieving prayer and answer it, particularly if it is by one in whom he is beginning to work and whom he intends to lead to full faith in Jesus Christ. But for Christians this otherwise fortuitous event is not just a possibility; it is a promise. It is the promise that the one who meets the condition of having believed on Jesus Christ (and the other conditions that will come in a moment) will have his prayers answered.

No Other Name

The second thing meant by the phrase "in my name" is that the one approaching God is approaching him on no other basis than on what the Lord Jesus Christ has done. Right here, of course, we have trouble, even as Christians, for often when we pray and do not get what we ask, it is because we have prayed, not in Jesus' name (though we may have said those words), but rather in our name imagining that we have some claim upon God.

R. A. Torrey, whom I mentioned earlier, tells a story that illustrates this point. He had been in Melbourne, Australia, for a series of meetings. One day as he went up onto the platform to speak, a note was thrust into his hands, which read, "Dear Dr. Torrey: I am in great perplexity. I have been praying for a long time for something that I am confident is according to God's will, but I do not get it. I have been a member of the Presbyterian Church for thirty years, and have tried to be a consistent one all the time. I have been superintendent in the Sunday school for twenty-five years, and an elder in the church for twenty years; and yet God does not answer my prayer and I

cannot understand it. Can you explain it to me?"

Torrey took the note to the platform with him and read it. Then, because he had rightly detected something in the letter's tone, he answered like this: "It is perfectly easy to explain it. This man thinks that because he has been a consistent church member for thirty years, a faithful Sunday school superintendent for twenty-five years, and an elder in the church for twenty years, that God is under obligation to answer his prayer. He is really praying in his own name, and God will not hear our prayers when we approach Him in that way. We must, if we would have God answer our prayers, give up any thought that we have any claims upon God. There is not one of us who deserves anything from God. If we got what we deserved, every one of us would spend eternity in hell. But Jesus Christ has great claims on God, and we should go to God in our prayers not on the ground of any goodness in ourselves, but on the ground of Jesus Christ's claims."

At the close of the meeting a gentleman came up to Torrey and said, "I am the man who wrote that note. You have hit the nail square on the head. I did think that because I had been a consistent church member for thirty years, a Sunday school superintendent for twenty-five years, and an elder in the church for twenty years, that God was under obligation to answer my prayers.

I see my mistake."

Many people make the same mistake. They imagine that because they have done certain things for God they therefore have a claim upon God. But no sinful human being has any claim upon him. Only the Lord Jesus Christ has a claim. To pray in the name of Jesus is, therefore, first, to come to God as a Christian, having believed on Jesus, and, second, to come humbly, recognizing that we have no claims upon him but that Jesus himself does and that we can approach God solely on that basis.

In Raws's Name

Even at this point I suppose there are some who still think that praying in the name of Jesus is like waving a magic wand over our own desires in order to cause them to be granted. Such persons may admit that one must certainly be a Christian in order to pray effectively. They will even admit that we cannot come on the basis of our own merit. Indeed, that was the great Reformation principle! Every Christian knows that! Still, they persist in regarding the name of Christ as an incantation to get their desires. We need to add a third point, therefore. To pray in Jesus' name is to pray as one who lives the life of Christ. Consequently, it is to pray as he would pray and for what he desires.

Ralph L. Keiper had an excellent illustration of this point. He used to point out that at the Keswick Bible Conference grounds at Keswick, New Jersey, there is a work for alcoholics known as the Colony of Mercy. Through this colony, under the direction of its founder William Raws, son Addison C. Raws, and a grandson William A. Raws, men who have been ruined by drink are introduced to the Savior and are restored to society as they allow the Lord to be the remedy for their ruin.

Let us suppose, as Keiper suggests, that one of the men becomes tired of the rules of the colony and so leaves it for the nearby town, where he heads for the nearest bar. He enters and says to the bartender, "Give me a shot of gin in Raws's name."

The bartender is about to fill the order when the owner steps around the corner and asks, "What did you say you wanted?"

"I want a shot of gin in Raws's name!" answers the man as he places his right foot on the bar rail.

The owner of the saloon begins to question the customer. "Do you mean Addison Raws of the Colony of Mercy, the man whose father founded the Colony, and whose work it is to take a bum like you and make a man of him? Is this the Raws you mean?"

"You're right as a rabbit, Mister," says the derelict. "He's the very man."

The face of the owner clouds over with sternness. "You are a liar!" he says. "How dare you charge this drink to Raws? If you were really coming in his name, you would have passed this place by, or, if you had come in, you would be looking for someone like yourself to take back to the Colony. Dr. Raws is not a drinking man, and those who name his name are not customers of mine."

Keiper wrote, 'To pray in the name of Christ is a serious matter, not to be taken lightly. We ask for many things without regard for our Lord, because we would please ourselves instead of Him. Wives would have husbands saved for the sake of having an inexpensive chauffeur to drive them to 'meetings,' or so they no longer would need to be embarrassed by the ladies of the church who find drinking, unsaved men wretched. Husbands, too, find their prayers unanswered because they continually criticize their wives in private, as well as public, forgetting that Christ never criticized His wife—the Church (1 Peter 3:7). A consistent, Christ-like conduct convinces us that God can trust us with His blessings. God will never waste a blessing or a kindness on a careless, selfish saint."

God Glorified

There is one more requirement. Thus far we have looked at the phrase "in *my* name" and have found that it means the following three things: (1) that we must be Christians, (2) that we must approach God on the basis of Christ's merit and not on the basis of any supposed merit of our own, and (3) that we must pray as Christ would pray while at the same time living a life consistent with his desires. But there is also a second

phrase in our text, and that is "that the Son may bring glory to the Father." This is very important, for having said that our prayers must be consistent with the desires of our Lord, we immediately go on to ask, "And what is it that the Lord Jesus Christ desires?" The answer, in its shortest form, is in this phrase. It is that God may be glorified. The application is that, if this was Jesus' desire, then it should obviously be our desire too.

This is a new thought for many people, for we are so filled with the idea that prayer is getting something from God, that we rarely consider that prayer is actually a means by which God gets something from us. What he wants from us is glory, a glory that will lead others to trust him.

Here I wish to draw upon another illustration by Ralph Keiper. Ralph, as those who knew him are aware, suffered from limited vision. What we can see at 100 feet he could see at 10. So obviously there were many times in his early life when he complained to God of his affliction. "Why should I suffer from this limitation? God could do something about it if he wanted to," he reasoned. He prayed about his problem and got nowhere. Moreover, he could not even see the reason for God's delay. He had tried to please the Lord as best he knew how. Why was God silent?

Then one Saturday afternoon, when as a young theological student he was idling over his books, the Holy Spirit began to speak to him and ask several questions: "What is the chief end of man?" "To glorify God, and to enjoy him forever!" Ralph replied.

"Do you wish to glorify God?" the Holy Spirit countered.

"Of course!" the young student hastened to assure him.

"If you had the choice, what would you rather do, glorify God or have perfect vision?"

Ralph paused for a long while. His "of course" began to weaken. For, as he points out, sight is a very precious commodity, especially to those who do not have it. He had to be honest because the Holy Spirit was

watching and knew his heart. He knew that sight was far more precious to Ralph than God's glory. The struggle within was bitter, but Ralph was a victim of grace.

"There is only one answer," he said finally, "and that choice is to glorify God."

The Holy Spirit insisted on continuing his probe. "Do you really believe that God's glory is more important than your vision?" He did not push for an answer, but waited quietly.

At last Ralph surrendered. "My vision, or lack of it, is not worthy to be compared to the glory of
God!"

"Do you really wish to glorify God?" the Holy Spirit asked again.

'Yes, I do!"

"If you do, why worry about the method which God chooses for you to glorify him?"

The goal of prayer is not the fulfilling of our own requests; it is the glorification of God. But do we really know that? Remember that while he was here on earth the Lord Jesus Christ glorified the Father. He said in his great priestly prayer of John 17, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (v. 4). But the way Jesus did this was not by any way that we would call glorious. Jesus was a wandering preacher who, as he himself said, had nowhere to lay his head. He was misunderstood. He was ridiculed. His own disciples did not understand him. Eventually one betrayed him while still another denied him. All deserted him. Then he was arrested, tried, cruelly beaten, and executed. This was not what we would desire, either for Jesus or for ourselves. Yet this was God's will for Jesus, and it was precisely in these things that God was glorified.

Do we really know what that means? If we do, it will not be a matter of indifference; rather it will transform our lives. As life goes on we will undoubtedly suffer many of the things that are common to the life of

mankind. We will get sick. Friends will get sick and pass away. Many disappointments will come in our homes, work, and other areas. Eventually we will die. How will you and I react in these circumstances? Will we complain and blame God? Or will we receive these circumstances from his hand and seek to glorify him in them? If we choose the latter, we will be able to demonstrate the reality of God's great grace and peace, produced by God's sovereign choice in suffering Christians.

When sorrows come the world panics. It has no answer in the face of disappointments, no hope in death. We have hope. Moreover, we have the privilege of coming to God in prayer in order that our will might be made increasingly conformable to his will and that others might therefore be led to glorify him through our testimony.

Chapter 182.
"Keep My Commands"

John 14:15

It is hard to imagine a more wonderful series of promises than those from the middle of John 14. One promise is that those who are Christ's shall do even greater works than Jesus' works. Another is that whatever we shall ask by prayer in Jesus' name he will do. In all honesty, however, we must admit (as we have done in our earlier studies of these two promises) that they do have qualifications and that we are often unable to enjoy the full scope of the promises simply because we are unwilling to meet the conditions.

The condition that we now look at is the third in a series of four, as a result of which Jesus will do even greater works in us than he himself did while on earth. It is the condition of obedience flowing from love. But we want to note, as we begin this study, that obedience and love are not only conditions for our doing "greater works" than Jesus' works, though that is true. They are also conditions for the exercise of effectual

prayer, mentioned just a verse or two earlier. In these verses Jesus had expressed the conditions of effectual prayer as being prayer "in his name" and "that the Son may bring glory to the Father." Now it is as though he elaborates upon those thoughts, adding that it will also mean love for himself and obedience to his commands. If we do not desire these two things above all, all other petitions will remain unanswered. If we do desire them, they will be answered. As John later says in his first letter to the churches of Asia: "[We] receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him" (1 John 3:22).

Having said this, however, we may also note that this verse rightly stands alone and therefore conveys lessons of itself. In particular, it teaches us about the proper relationship between love for Christ and Christ's commandments, and what the possession of both of them proves.

If We Love Jesus

The first lesson is the obvious lesson of the verse. It is that *if we love Jesus, we must (and indeed will) keep his commandments.* This truth is important, for it strikes at once at any perversion of the Christian faith by antinomianism.

Antinomianism is an unfamiliar word to most people, but it is not hard to understand. It is the view that the commandments of the Word of God have no proper place in Christianity. Usually the expressions of this view contrast law with grace in a way that eliminates the value of law entirely. Thus, in the name of grace the God of grace, who is also a God of holiness and justice, is eliminated. People are told that law is an enemy of grace, that the God of Sinai is a stern and unlovable deity who is rightly banished from the pages of the New Testament and that today the only possible guide for any ethical system is love. As might be expected, in this system outright disobedience to the commands of God is countenanced. Thus, marriages may be broken up, adultery sanctioned, contracts broken, parents rejected, worldly goods coveted,

and countless other things eagerly embraced—so long as the actions do not "hurt" anyone and "love" remains the underlying motivation.

But this is a travesty. We admit, of course—indeed, we must proclaim it widely—that salvation is never by works, that it is always by grace. At this point law and grace *are* opposites. The Book of Galatians stands as a commanding witness to that fact. We will even admit that the proper way to live the Christian life is not by imposing a list of rules (even God-given rules) either upon ourselves or others. To do this may assure an outward conformity to a certain external expression of Christian character. But it does not change the heart. That is why love, not law, must lie at the heart of Christian ethics. In this, the exponents of situation ethics, or the new morality, are right. But having said this, we must immediately go on to add that any love that does not express itself in conformity with the commands of Christ is not the kind of love about which Christ was speaking. Indeed, it is a pseudo-love, a love that is false in itself and that deals falsely with the one espousing it.

A number of years ago, when the so-called "new morality" was at the crest of its popularity, a number of theologians met at one of our prestigious eastern seminaries to discuss it. Most were in favor of the new morality. So the discussion centered on the value of being free from rules and regulations, including those found in the Bible. "But there must be some guidelines," someone said. This was discussed, and at length it was decided that the only acceptable guideline was love. Anything that flowed from love was permissible. Anything was allowed so long as it did not hurt anyone.

While the discussion was progressing along these lines, a Roman Catholic priest, who had been invited to the discussion and who was in the room, became very quiet. At length his silence was noticeable. So the others turned to him and asked, "What do you think? Don't you agree that the only limiting factor in any ethical decision is love?"

The priest replied, "If you love me, keep my commandments." He was right. Love may be a valuable guideline, but only if it is love in

conformity with the love of God and therefore also in conformity with the commandments he has given.

This does not devalue love, however, for the two go together. In fact, only love will succeed in moving us to keep the commandments. Here Maclaren has written wisely, "The principle that underlies these words, then, is this, that love is the foundation of obedience, and obedience is the sure outcome and result of love.... That is exactly what distinguishes and lifts the morality of the gospel above all other systems. The worst man in the world knows a great deal more of his duty than the best man does. It is not for want of knowledge that men go to the devil, but it is for want of power or will to live their knowledge. And what morality fails to do, with its clearest utterances of human duty, Christ comes and does. The one law is like the useless proclamations posted up in some rebellious district, where there is no army to back them, and the king's authority from whom they come is flouted. The other law gets itself obeyed. Such is the difference between the powerless morality of the world and the commandment of Jesus Christ. Here is the road plain and straight. What matters that, if there is no force to draw the cart along it? There might as well be no road at all. Here stand all your looms, polished and in perfect order, but there is no steam in the boilers; and so there is no motion, and nothing is woven. What we want is not law, but power, and what the gospel gives us, and stands alone in giving us, is not merely the knowledge of the will of God, and the clear revelation of what we ought to be, but the power to become it.

"Love does that, and love alone. That strong force brought into action in our hearts will drive out from thence all rivals, all false and low things. The true way to cleanse the Augean stables, as the old myth has it, was to turn the river into them. It would have been endless work to wheel out the filth in wheelbarrows loaded by spades: turn the stream in, and it will sweep away all the foulness. When the Ark comes into the Temple, Dagon lies, a mutilated stump, upon the threshold. When Christ comes into my heart, then all the obscene and twilight-loving shapes that lurked there and defiled it, will vanish like ghosts at cock-crowing before His calm and pure Presence. He, and He alone, entering my heart

by the portals of my love, will coerce my evil and stimulate my good. And if I love Him, I shall keep His commandments."

By This We Know

There is a second lesson in this verse. It comes from the reverse of what we have been saying. Thus far we have said that if we truly love Christ, that is, if we love him with the kind of love about which he is speaking and with which he loves us, we will keep his commandments. But we may also say (for the proposition is reversible) that *if we keep his commandments, we will love (and can know that we love) Jesus.* This reversal is valid, for Jesus makes it himself just a few verses later: "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him" (v. 21). John also makes this point in his first letter: "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.... But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him" (1 John 2:3, 5).

But how does this happen? How can we be assured by obedience that we really are Christ's own?

The answer is in the nature of man. In their natural state, men and women are in rebellion against God. Consequently, it is not within them to want to obey God. This is precisely the point Maclaren was developing in the quotation that was given earlier. When a man or woman begins to obey God, first in responding to his offer of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ and then in a growing desire to live a Christlike life, this is evidence of a divine and supernatural working in his or her life. It is proof that God is present and that he has already begun a regenerative work within the individual.

So take heart, Christian, and be assured of God's saving work in your life. None of this means that we therefore obey God completely, just because we are his. We still sin. That is why John writes, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). But it does mean that if you detect within yourself a new yearning to please God, if sin begins to disturb you, if you increasingly

long to be like Jesus, then God is at work; and you should rejoice in the truth that "he who began a good work in you will [keep on performing] it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

Love One Another

There is a third truth in this verse, and it is also evident. If we read these words—"If you love me, you will obey what I command"—and then ask, as we must, "But what are Christ's commandments?" we are immediately led back to that greatest of all commandments, found in John 13: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (v. 34). In other words, *if we love Jesus, we must (and will) love other Christians.* Do you love others? You must not be too quick to answer, for in the New Testament the love about which Jesus is speaking is very practical. It means at least three things.

First, it means *service.* This is evident from the context in which the new commandment was given. Jesus had just divested himself of his clothing, girded himself with a towel, and then had washed the disciples' feet. The disciples undoubtedly thought this was improper. Peter actually objected, saying, "You shall never wash my feet" (13:8). But Jesus corrected Peter and then taught them all: "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (vv. 13-15). That is the picture Jesus gave of true Christianity. It is the attitude that divests itself of its own prerogatives in order to serve others.

Second, the practice of love means *sacrifice.* This means that we are not called to serve only when we can do so conveniently and at no cost to ourselves. It means that we are called to serve at our cost when we would much rather do something else. Jesus did this obviously; for his parable of service, washing the disciples' feet, was completed only when he had gone to the cross and there made the atonement by which alone they could be washed from the contamination of sin.

Finally, the practice of love also means *sharing*, sharing of ourselves, on the one hand, and sharing the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ, on the other. Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). He said, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20). How can we claim to love Christ if we disregard this great commandment?

If We Love Others

The final point is a reversal of the third, just as the second point was a reversal of the first. It is this: *if we love others, then we can know that we truly love Jesus and are one of his own.* John says it clearly, "Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death" (1 John 3:13-14). According to these words, we can be assured that we are truly born again if, in obedience to Christ's commands, we find ourselves beginning to love and actually loving others for whom he also died.

Jesus Loves Me

At this point we must return to the phrase with which our text began: "If you love me." Once again it raises the question: Do we? Do we really love Jesus? Some will hear this question and reply, humbly but nevertheless honestly, "Yes, I do; I really do love him." If that is the case, here is the way to show it—by loving others (as well as himself) and by doing what he desires.

Some will not be able to say this, though they may actually love Jesus more than they are aware they do. If you are one who would like to love him but who has not been able to do it, at least to your satisfaction, let me assure you that you will never learn to love by imposing it upon yourself as a duty. You will never love by saying, "I will love, I will love, I will love," any more than you can stop coughing by saying, "I

will not cough." There is only one way in which you will come to love God, and that is by coming to know and believe in his love for you. Love provokes love. His love calls forth yours. Consequently, the way to love God is to learn that he loved you so much that he gave his only begotten Son for your salvation.

Torrey tells of a little girl who came to the great English preacher Mark Guy Pearse one day and, looking up into his face quite wistfully, said, "Mr. Pearse, I don't love Jesus. I wish I did love Jesus, but I don't love Jesus. Won't you please tell me how to love Jesus?"

The preacher looked down into those eager eyes and said to her, "Little girl, as you go home today keep saying to yourself, 'Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me.' And when you come back next Sunday I think you will be able to say, 'I love Jesus.'"

The next Sunday the little girl came up to him again, this time with happy eyes and a radiant face, and exclaimed, "Oh, Mr. Pearse, I do love Jesus, I do love Jesus. Last Sunday as I went home I kept saying to myself, 'Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me.' And I began to think about his love and I began to think how he died on the cross in my place, and I found my cold heart growing warm, and the first I knew it was full of love to Jesus."

That is the only way any of us ever learn to love Jesus. We begin by learning to believe what the Bible says when it tells us that we are the vilest of sinners but how, nevertheless, Jesus died in our place, the just for the unjust. It tells us that he has "borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows." It shows how he was "pierced for our transgressions" and "bruised for our iniquities," how "the punishment that brought us peace was upon him," how "with his stripes we are healed." We begin by believing on him as the Bible portrays him. Next we see his love and come to love him. Then, because we love him, we keep his commands.

Chapter 183.

That Other Comforter

John 14:16-18

The Christian church reaffirms its faith in the Holy Spirit every time it recites the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the Holy Ghost." But beyond this rather formal acknowledgment, in large sectors of the church one would be hard pressed to find a reference to the Third Person of the Trinity at all.

J. I. Packer has written of this ignorance: "Christian people are not in doubt as to the work that Christ did; they know that He redeemed men by His atoning death, even if they differ among themselves as to what exactly this involved. But the average Christian is in a complete fog as to what work the Holy Spirit does. Some talk of the Spirit of Christ in the way that one would talk of the Spirit of Christmas—as a vague cultural pressure making for bonhomie and religiosity.

Some think of the Spirit as inspiring the moral convictions of unbelievers like Gandhi, or the theosophical mysticism of a Rudolf Steiner. But most, perhaps, do not think of the Holy Spirit at all, and have no positive ideas of any sort about what He does. They are for practical purposes in the same position as the disciples whom Paul met at Ephesus—'We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost' (Acts 9:2)."

Why is this? It is hard to say why. But one thing is certain: It is an abnormal situation. It is abnormal from the viewpoint of Christ's teachings, for Christ clearly taught about the Holy Spirit. He did so in the verses we are studying in order to provide comfort to his disciples and to all who should follow them throughout the church age. Knowledge of the Holy Spirit and dependence upon the Holy Spirit are necessary conditions of doing those "greater things" that he mentions in verse 12. Ignorance of the Holy Spirit's work is also abnormal from the viewpoint of the author of the fourth Gospel, for he has shown his interest by including many verses about the Holy Spirit in the last discourses.

Personality or Power?

The first point we must settle in our minds in regard to the Holy Spirit is whether the Holy Spirit is a real person, whose work it is to get hold of us and use us, or whether the Holy Spirit is merely some vague power we are to get hold of and use to our benefit. This is important as a mere matter of truth; for either the Holy Spirit is a real person, or he is not. But it is also important on a practical level. If we think of the Holy Spirit as a mysterious power, our thought will continually be, "How can I get more of the Holy Spirit?" If we think of the Holy Spirit as a person, our thought will be, "How can the Holy Spirit have more of me?" The first thought is entirely pagan. The second is New Testament Christianity.

Reuben A. Torrey, who has written an excellent book on the Holy Spirit, carefully spells this out: "The conception of the Holy Spirit as a Divine influence or power that we are somehow to get hold of and use, leads to self-exaltation and self-sufficiency. One who so thinks of the Holy Spirit and who at the same time imagines that he has received the Holy Spirit will almost inevitably be full of spiritual pride and strut about as if he belonged to some superior order of Christians. One frequently hears such persons say, 'I am a Holy Ghost man,' or 'I am a Holy Ghost woman.' But if we once grasp the thought that the Holy Spirit is a Divine Person of infinite majesty, glory and holiness and power, who in marvelous condescension has come into our hearts to make His abode there and take possession of our lives and make use of them, it will put us in the dust and keep us in the dust. I can think of no thought more humbling or more overwhelming than the thought that a person of Divine majesty and glory dwells in my heart and is ready to use even me."

We see this difference illustrated in the pages of the New Testament, as we might expect. On the one hand, there is the case of Simon the magician, whose story is told in Acts 8:9-24. He apparently believed in Christ through the preaching of Philip at Samaria, for we are told that he "believed... and... was baptized" (v. 13). But he knew little about Christianity and therefore fell into the mistake of thinking that the Holy

Spirit was a power to be purchased. He actually offered the disciples money in order to receive "it." To this, Peter, who was also in Samaria at the time, responded, "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart" (vv. 20-22).

The other example is from the beginning of the missionary movement involving Paul and
Barnabas. Of this we are told that "while they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy
Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2). In the one case, an individual wanted to get and use God, whom he imagined to be merely a power. In the second case, God got and used two individuals.

Words or Reality?

We must admit that when we begin to talk about the Holy Spirit as a person, we are attempting to put into words something that is actually larger than words. What we are saying is that the Holy Spirit is one member of the Trinity, equal in all ways to both the Father and the Son. But we are not saying that there are three gods, which the term "member" or even "person" seems to imply. There are three persons; but in a way which is beyond our understanding these three are also one. We also confess as the Old Testament does, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4).

In these verses Jesus speaks of the Holy Spirit saying, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you." This is a great promise, but it is great precisely because of the personality of the Spirit. If the Spirit were only a power, the promise would be in the nature of a compensation—"I am going to be taken from you, but I will give you *something* to make up for my

departure." This is not what this verse is talking about. It is not a thing that is being given, but rather another divine personality that is being sent. This one must have knowledge, for he will know of the disciples' distress. He must have feelings, for he will identify with them in their distress and comfort them. He must have will, for he will determine to carry out this commission.

The personality of the Holy Spirit is evident from the Scriptures in other ways also. One commentator has summed up the evidence in the following six propositions:

1. The personal actions ascribed to the Holy Spirit prove his personality. An example is John 14:16-18, for there he is promised as a Counselor for Christians. One other example is 1 Corinthians 12:11, in which he is said to be at work in Christians, imparting those spiritual gifts necessary for the well-being of the church.

2. His distinction from the Father and Son and his mission from both prove his personality. Jesus indicates this relationship by saying, "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me" (John 15:26).

3. The coordinate rank and power that belong to the Holy Spirit equally with the Father and the Son prove it. All trinitarian benedictions make this point clearly. Thus, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Or again, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Cor. 13:14).

4. The appearance of the Holy Spirit under a visible form at the baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ and on the day of Pentecost proves it. Of the former event it is written, "And the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased'" (Luke 3:22). Of the second instance it is written, "They

saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them" (Acts 2:3).

5. The sin against the Holy Spirit proves it, for this implies offense against a personality. It is mentioned in Matthew 12:31-32.
6. The way in which the Holy Spirit is distinguished from his gifts also proves that he is a person and not merely a spiritual force or power. Thus, in 1 Corinthians 12, after having enumerated the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, the discerning of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues, Paul writes, "But all these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines."

Here are six separate and conclusive lines of argument showing that the Holy Spirit is a person. But the problem we have is still probably not so much the doctrine itself as our attitude toward him. Theoretically we probably do believe that the Holy Spirit is a person, the third person of the Godhead. But do we actually think about him in this way? Perhaps we do what a woman did who had attended a series of messages on the Holy Spirit at a Bible conference years ago. She listened carefully and then came up to the speaker to thank him for his teaching. She said, "Before your messages I never thought of *it* as a person." Apparently she was not thinking of him as a person even then.

Is He God?

The first point that the Lord Jesus makes in his teaching about the Holy Spirit is that he is a person, as we have seen. But what sort of a person is he? Is he an angel? Is he a being superior to an angel but inferior to both the Father and the Son? Or is he equal to the Father and the Son? Is he God? Actually, we have already begun to answer these questions in talking about the personality of the Spirit, but the answer is also taught in the verses that constitute our text.

Here the Lord speaks of the Holy Spirit as "another Counselor." It is important in understanding

Christ's words to notice that there are two different words for "another" in the Greek New
Testament. One word is *allos*, the word we have here; it means "another just like the first one." The second word, *heteros*, means "totally different." Since there are these two words with two meanings it is always important to know which one is used whenever the word "another" occurs in the English text. It is the first word, the word meaning "another exactly like the first one," that is used when Jesus speaks of sending the disciples "another Counselor."

Who is the first Counselor? It is obviously Jesus himself. Therefore, the second Counselor is to be just like him. That is, he is to be another divine being living with them and in them.

Once again, as in the matter of the personality of the Holy Spirit, other parts of Scripture reinforce this teaching. We may summarize the points thus:

1. Divine attributes are ascribed to the Spirit. The word "holy" is itself a divine attribute, at least in its most exalted sense. So also are the attributes of omniscience (1 Cor. 2:10-11; John 16:1213), omnipotence (Luke 1:35), and omnipresence (Ps. 139:7-10).
2. Works that are exclusively the works of God are attributed to the Holy Spirit. Creation is one example. In the Book of Job we read, "By his breath the skies became fair" (26:13) and 'The Spirit of God has made me" (33:4). The Holy Spirit is described as the One who imparts life, another divine work (John 3:6; Rom 8:11). He is the One responsible for the giving forth of the Word of God, the Bible. "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).
3. The Holy Spirit is ranked coordinate with God the Father and God the Son. The benedictions cited earlier are examples of this.
4. The name of God is indirectly given to him. The clearest example of this is in Acts 5:3-4, where Peter says to Ananias, "Ananias,

how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit?... Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God."

Practical Theology

Does it really matter that we know and constantly recognize that the Holy Spirit is divine? Yes, it does, for if we know and constantly recognize his deity, we will recognize and rely on his work. If we do not, then we will foolishly rely on our own limited wisdom, love, strength and other resources, and forfeit that which he alone can provide.

In his writings on the Holy Spirit to which I referred at the start of this study, J. I. Packer asks these pertinent questions: "Do we honour the Holy Spirit by recognising and relying on His work? Or do we slight Him by ignoring it, and thereby dishonour, not merely the Spirit, but the Lord who sent Him? In our faith: do we acknowledge the authority of the Bible, the prophetic Old Testament and the apostolic New Testament which He inspired? Do we read and hear it with the reverence and receptiveness that are due to the Word of God? If not, we dishonour the Holy Spirit. In our life: do we apply the authority of the Bible, and live by the Bible, whatever men may say against it, recognising that God's word cannot but be true, and that what God has said He certainly means, and will stand to? If not, we dishonour the Holy Spirit, who gave us the Bible. In our witness: do we remember that the Holy Spirit alone, by His witness, can authenticate our witness, and look to Him to do so, and trust Him to do so, and show the reality of our trust, as Paul did, by eschewing the gimmicks of human cleverness? If not, we dishonour the Holy Spirit."

The personality and deity of the Holy Spirit, as well as other truths about him, are practical teachings. What remains is that we take them down off the shelf of high theology and put them to work in our lives.

Chapter 184.
The Role of the Holy Spirit

John 14:16-18

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

There are many things we may want to learn about a person when we are first getting to know him or her. But in most cases our first questions are two: first, Who are you? and, second, What do you do? The first can be answered by a name, followed by a brief description of where the person comes from and to whom he is related. The second generally deals with the person's occupation. We may follow a similar procedure in these introductory studies to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In the last study we asked: "Who are you?" We saw that the Holy Spirit is a divine being, equal to God the Father and God the Son in all respects. Now we want to ask what the Holy Spirit does.

Christ Glorified

In one sense the question is nearly unanswerable, for if the Holy Spirit is God, as he is, then all that God the Father does and God the Son does, the Holy Spirit also does. Thus, it is proper to say that the Holy Spirit created the universe, planned the great work of redemption, was active in the entire ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, raised him from the dead, called forth and is directing the church, and will one day bring all things together in subjection to him who is the Father of all. Indeed, there are verses in the Bible that make these points, as we have seen.

On the other hand, we must also recognize that the Bible emphasizes different activities for each of the three members of the Godhead, according to which it is possible to say, for example, that the Father is principally active in the work of creation and that the Son is principally active in the redemption of our race. Therefore, although it is almost impossible to say all that the Spirit does in the first sense, it is possible to speak of the primary emphasis of his ministry in the second.

So what does the Holy Spirit primarily do? Some would answer by saying that the Holy Spirit is active most of all in the sanctification of Christians or in the inspiration of the Bible or in giving specific gifts to individuals within the church. These things are true, but they are not the best answers. The best answer is found in John 16:13-14, in which the Lord Himself says of the Spirit's work, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." These verses tell us that the role of the Holy Spirit is primarily to glorify Christ. Indeed, when they are correctly understood, all the other activities that might be mentioned—sanctification, inspiration, the imparting of gifts, even the work of creation—are included within this one great and overriding purpose.

So we can learn a lesson from this, right at the beginning. We are told that the Holy Spirit will not speak of himself, but of Jesus. Therefore, we may conclude that any emphasis upon the person and work of the Spirit that detracts from the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ is not the Spirit's doing. It is the work of another spirit, the spirit of antichrist, whose work it is to detract from Jesus (cf. 1 John 4:2-3). Important as he is, the Holy Spirit is never to preempt the place of Jesus in our thinking. On the other hand, wherever Jesus is exalted—in whatever way— there the Third Person of the Trinity is at work.

Spirit of Truth

How specifically does the Holy Spirit glorify the Lord Jesus Christ? He does so in four areas.

First, the Holy Spirit has glorified Jesus (past tense) by teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ in the Scriptures. This is deeply involved in the teaching of these last discourses, for one of the points Jesus makes is that after he would be gone, the Holy Spirit would lead the disciples into all the truth concerning Jesus, and as a result of this they would be able to preach the true gospel and record infallibly, in the pages of the New Testament, the teachings of Jesus and the meaning of his teachings

and ministry. This is what he is talking about when he says, "When the Counselor comes ... he will testify about me" (John 15:26). Or again, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all [the] truth" (16:12-13).

This is a tremendous word for the disciples. They knew, no doubt, that in the Old Testament period the Holy Spirit had come upon certain prophets, kings, and other leaders in order to speak through them in what eventually came to be the Old Testament. They might even have known— though they undoubtedly came to know it more fully after the resurrection—that the central message of the Old Testament was the promise of God to send a Redeemer, who was the Lord Jesus Christ. Now they are told that the same Holy Spirit, who inspired the Old Testament so that those living in the Old Testament period might anticipate the Messiah and look to him for salvation, is going to come upon them—indeed, be in them—so that nothing about Christ's work or teachings necessary for our salvation and the growth and ordering of the church might be lost.

That is precisely what happened. Some of the events and teachings they recorded were things they had heard and seen and that they remembered. Other points were revealed to them later for the first time. In both cases these men were led by the Holy Spirit. In fact, it was as true of them as Peter said it was of the Old Testament authors: "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

In this work the Holy Spirit amply glorified the Lord Jesus Christ, for he prepared for his coming through the inspiration of the Old Testament that told men what to expect and when to expect him. Then he preserved the story of his coming and gave the only true interpretation of it through the inspiration of the New Testament books.

Born of God

Second, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ by drawing men and women to him. This has been discussed so often in our exposition of John's Gospel that it does not need to be presented fully now. We need only to point out that apart from this activity of the Holy Spirit, irrespective of the inspiration of the Bible, no one would ever have come to Jesus.

The verses about the Holy Spirit that we are studying make this plain. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in leading men and women to Christ, no one can either see, know, or receive spiritual things. They cannot *see* because they are spiritually blind. As Jesus said, "Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). They cannot *know* because the things of the Spirit "are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). They cannot *receive either* the Holy Spirit or the Lord Jesus Christ because, as Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44).

The Holy Spirit opens blind eyes so that the unregenerate may see the truth. He unfogs their minds so that they may understand what they see, and then gently woos their wills until they come to place their faith in the Savior. Without this work there would not be a single Christian in the world. By means of it the Holy Spirit saves us and glorifies the Lord Jesus.

Reproducing Christ

Third, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ by reproducing him in believers. He does this in three ways: (1) by leading the Christian to greater victory over sin, (2) by praying for him and by teaching him to pray, and (3) by showing him God's will for his life and enabling him to walk in it.

Here the meaning of the word "counselor" or "comforter" is of great importance. It is unfortunate from the point of view of our trying to understand this term that in the English language "comfort" has been watered down so that it now means little more than a half-hearted attempt to console someone, or that which consoles. It can, for example,

be a Linus blanket. In fact, that is not far off linguistically, for one use of the word "comforter" is to describe a certain kind of quilt. That is often what we have in mind when we think of comfort. Comfortable! We think of rolling up in our blanket and consoling ourselves from the hard knocks of this world.

That is not what the word means in the Bible, though a certain measure of consolation is involved in it. To understand the biblical word, we need to go back to the Latin words that lie behind our word "comfort." There are two of them. The first is *cum* (which has had its vowel changed in the process of taking it over into English). It is a preposition meaning "with." The second is *fortis*, from which we get our words fortification, fortify, fortissimo (Italian), fortitude, and fortress. It means "strong" or "strengthen." Put them together, and you have the true meaning of "comforter." A comforter is one who is with you to strengthen you. He is, as one commentator writes, "a ramrod down your backbone to make you stand for the truth; to make you take the right side, even though it's the minority side. The Comforter gives you strength to stand up in face of something that is vile and evil."

This is what the Holy Spirit did with Peter. Peter had denied the Lord on the night of his arrest because he was afraid of a little girl who was only a doorkeeper. But on the day of Pentecost, after the Holy Spirit had come, Peter stood up to preach the gospel before the men who had crucified Jesus, saying, "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.... Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:22-24, 36). The Holy Spirit gave Peter a backbone, making him like Jesus, and through him brought glory to the Lord.

Thus far, in trying to understand the word "Comforter" we have only dealt with the meaning of the English word, which comes from the Latin. When we go beyond the English word to the Greek word we find an entirely new, though related, area of meaning, which in turn teaches us more about the Spirit's ministry. The Greek word in this text is *paraklētos*. The first two syllables, *para*, are the Greek word meaning "alongside of." We have it in English words such as parable, paradox, parallax, and parallel. The second two syllables, *klētos*, means "called," as in the Greek word for "church" (*ekklēsia*) meaning the ones who are "called out." *Paraklētos* therefore means "one who is called alongside of another person as that person's helper.

Incidentally, in the Latin Vulgate the word is translated, not by any variation on our word
"comforter" but by the word *advocatus*, which gives us the word "advocate." *Ad* means
"alongside of." *Vocatus* is from *vocare*, meaning "to call." So *advocatus* also means "one who is called alongside of" another person as that person's helper. *Advocate* is Latin. *Paraclete* is Greek. But the meaning of the two words is identical.

This idea is further substantiated in 1 John 2:1, although in this case the word *paraklētos* is actually translated "advocate." There we read, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father, in our defense— Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."

These two are working together for us. Moreover, they are praying for us. We know that the
Lord Jesus Christ is praying for us, because in Hebrews 7:25 it says, "Therefore, he [that is, Christ] is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." He is praying for us in heaven. We know that the Holy Spirit is praying for us and helping us to pray, because in Romans 8:26 we are told, "In the same way, the Spirit helps in our weakness. We do not

know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."

What should trouble us then? Nothing! We cannot be troubled about our salvation; Christ has purchased it for us, and the Holy Spirit has sealed it to our hearts. Moreover, they are both free to plead our case before the Father. "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Rom. 8:33-34). We cannot be troubled about our growth into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ either, for this is the goal of the Spirit's work within us. Paul says: "through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:2-4).

Christian Service

The fourth way in which the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ is by directing Christ's followers into Christian service and sustaining them in it. This was to be true of the disciples, as most of the verses about the Holy Spirit in the last discourses indicate; he was to direct them in the future in precisely the way Jesus had directed them in the past. This is also true for those who have come after these early followers of our Lord.

One example is in the passage I mentioned briefly, and for another reason, in the last study: Acts 13:2 and the verses that follow. We read in those verses, "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from

there to Cyprus" (vv. 2-4). It is clear from these verses that the Holy Spirit calls men and women into definite lines of Christian work and goes with them as they go forth into this work. That is, he not only calls them into Christian work in a general way; he calls in a specific way, pointing to a definite field of endeavor.

Has he led you in such service? Is he leading? If not, you need to begin by wanting that leading and then by seeking it, expecting the Holy Spirit to give guidance.

Chapter 185.
The Fullness of the Holy Spirit

John 14:16-18

In our last study of the Holy Spirit we saw that one of the reasons why the Spirit is given to
Christians is to reproduce the character of Christ within them. That is the idea behind the word "Counselor" or "Comforter," for the Comforter is one who is called alongside the Christian to strengthen him or help him in his Christian walk. But this does not always happen, as we know.

What is wrong when Christians fail to live as Christ in this world? The answer given in Scripture is that they have not allowed the Holy Spirit to have his way in their lives. They have "quenched" the Spirit or "grieved" him (1 Thess. 5:19; Eph. 4:30). Consequently, these are urged to "walk" in the Spirit or "be filled" with him (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18). This use of language suggests that, while in the matter of redemption the Holy Spirit works in utter sovereignty, choosing whom he will and rejecting whom he will, in the matter of Christian growth there is by contrast a large measure of human responsibility. True, we can no more sanctify ourselves than we can redeem ourselves. God must do both. But having been made alive by God first, we can nevertheless cooperate in or resist the Holy Spirit's subsequent prodding.

To understand these truths and profit by them it is important that we understand what the Bible is talking about when it speaks of the "filling" of the Holy Spirit and why this is a necessary and continuous experience for every growing Christian.

The Baptism of the Spirit

We must begin with a negative consideration, however; and the negative consideration is that the "filling" of the Holy Spirit is not the same thing as the "baptism" of the Holy Spirit. What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit? The only answer that can honestly be given to that question is the answer that the Bible itself gives, and for that we must look at passages where the term "baptism of the Holy Spirit" occurs. There are seven of them in the New Testament.

Five of these are prophetic in nature; that is, they look forward to the pouring out of God's Spirit upon his people in accordance with Old Testament prophecies such as Isaiah 32:15; 44:3 and Joel 2:28. The distinctive feature about them is that they are related to the ministry of Jesus Christ. Thus, on four occasions John the Baptist is quoted as saying, "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matt. 3:11; parallels in Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3:16; and John 1:33). In the fifth instance Jesus is himself quoted as telling the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: "For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). In the Greek of these verses Jesus is called "the Baptist" or "the Baptizer" because it is a characteristic of his ministry to baptize with the Holy Spirit, just as John is called "the Baptist" because it was a characteristic of his ministry to baptize with water.

The sixth of the seven references to the baptism of the Holy Spirit is historic (Acts 11:16). It refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit to the household of Cornelius simultaneously with the belief of these people in Jesus as a result of Peter's preaching. The reference is significant because it shows that the Holy Spirit was to be given to Gentiles just as

it had previously been given to Jews; in other words, there were not to be two levels or ranks of Christians within the church.

The seventh reference is the most important because it is didactic; that is, it is a teaching passage rather than just a descriptive one and, therefore, gives us the doctrine upon which the other passages are to be interpreted. This passage is 1 Corinthians 12:13, in which Paul writes, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." Two things immediately strike us about this verse. First, the emphasis is upon the *unity of Christians.* The Christians at Corinth had allowed their emphasis upon spiritual gifts to divide them, but Paul writes to stress that they are actually one. His key argument is that they have been baptized by one Spirit into the one body of Christ. This is an immediate and obvious rebuke to anyone who would allow an emphasis upon a so-called "baptism of the Holy Spirit," defined as a second work of grace, to divide Christians and destroy fellowship.

The second and related emphasis of this verse is upon the *universality of this experience for all believers.* Here the word "all" is decisive, for Paul writes that "we were *all* baptized" and "were *all* given the one Spirit to drink." In other words, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, rather than being something that is a secondary and special experience for some Christians, is actually the initial experience of all by which, indeed, they have become Christians in the first place.

John R. W. Stott, in a valuable study of these verses, summarizes the evidence like this: "The 'gift' or 'baptism' of the Spirit, one of the *distinctive* blessings of the new covenant, is a *universal* blessing for members of the covenant, because it is an *initial* blessing. It is part and parcel of belonging to the new age. The Lord Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant and the bestower of its blessings, gives both the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit to all who enter his covenant. Further, baptism with water is the sign and seal of baptism with the Spirit, as much as it is of the forgiveness of sins. Water-

baptism is the initiatory Christian rite, because Spiritbaptism is the initiatory Christian experience."

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is for all Christians. In fact, if a person has not received it, he is not a Christian; for the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the same as being identified with Christ through saving faith. Moreover, in case we doubt this, we need to note that there is not a single instance in the New Testament in which any believer is urged or commanded to be baptized with the Holy Spirit for the simple reason that he cannot be urged to seek something that has already taken place in his life.

Filled with the Spirit

Having made this point, however, we must immediately go on to say that, although there is no command to be *baptized* with the Holy Spirit, there is, nevertheless, a clear command to be *"filled* with the Spirit," as I pointed out at the beginning of this study (Eph. 5:18).

At this point some will be saying that the distinction just made between being baptized with the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit is a meaningless one. "For what is the point of denying that we are to seek to be baptized with the Holy Spirit," someone might argue, "if in the next breath we admit that we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit, which is the same thing?" But are they the same thing? The point is that they are not and, moreover, that much of the false teaching we have concerning the Holy Spirit comes from failing to see this. For example, the baptism of the Holy Spirit has been closely linked to the experience of speaking in tongues, because the phrase is so often used of Pentecost where that took place. But this took place at Pentecost primarily to indicate that the new age had begun. By contrast, the filling with the Holy Spirit is associated with a wide variety of experiences (tongues being only one among many) and has a different emphasis entirely.

Here again we must go to the texts in which the words "fullness" or "filled with the Holy Spirit" occur. There are fourteen of them—four of them being descriptions of events or circumstances that took place

before Pentecost and that are therefore more in line with Old Testament references and experiences, and ten, of events or circumstances after Pentecost. The first four are all in Luke. They refer to Christ (4:1), John the Baptist (1:15), Elizabeth, the mother of John (1:41), and Zacharias, John's father (1:67). Nine of the remaining ten are in the Book of Acts and are descriptive. The last is Ephesians 5:18, in which the command to be "filled with the Holy Spirit" is given.

In the nine verses from Acts, we notice that the company waiting in the upper room on the day of Pentecost was filled with the Spirit (2:4); that Peter received a special filling before speaking to the Sanhedrin (4:8); that the early Christians were filled with the Spirit on one occasion following prayer, as a result of which they began to speak "the word of God with boldness" (4:31); that the first deacons were chosen as being men "full of the Spirit" (6:3); that Stephen, the first martyr, being "full of the Holy Spirit," saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father and testified of this fact (7:55); that Paul was filled with the Spirit when Ananias placed his hands upon him, Ananias having been sent to Paul following his experience on the road to Damascus (9:17); that Paul was "filled with the Holy Spirit" on another occasion as a result of which he confronted Elymas, the sorcerer, on Paphos (13:6); and that Barnabas (11:24) and the disciples at Antioch (13:52) were also each filled with the Spirit in other instances.

What is characteristic of these nine descriptions? It is not any external or supernatural manifestation of the Spirit such as a speaking in tongues, for that is associated only with the one reference to the filling with the Spirit at Pentecost. The only thing that is characteristic of all nine passages is that in every instance the person or group of persons who received the filling immediately began to testify to the Christian gospel. That is, they began to bear witness to Christ. The 120 did so at Pentecost. Peter did so before the Sanhedrin. So did the early disciples mentioned in Acts 4. Stephen, Paul, Barnabas, and the disciples at Antioch are other examples. In fact, the only apparent exception is the reference to the first deacons. But, on closer examination, even this is seen to be not a true exception, for we are not told of a filling of the

deacons by the Spirit. We are only told that they were men who gave evidence that their lives had already been filled by the Spirit. This was known, no doubt, by the fact that they already were active as witnesses. Moreover, the account of the choice of these deacons is immediately followed by the account of the death of one of them (Stephen), which contains a particularly effective witness.

So the first and most distinguishing mark of a filling with the Holy Spirit is that the person thus filled will be speaking of Jesus. He will not speak of his experience. He will not speak of the need for others to have his experience. He will speak of Jesus. At this point we inevitably come back to Jesus' own words in John 16:12-14: "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."

We may conclude from this that a filling with the Holy Spirit is the secret of any successful witness of the church to Christ in any age.

Fruit of the Spirit

However, we need to correct what may be a misunderstanding. Some may notice the emphasis of these verses upon testimony and immediately come to the conclusion that the Spirit's fullness has to do only with words. That is not correct, for obviously words are ineffective unless there is a godly life behind them to validate them. Here the command to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18) comes in; for when it is read in context, it has to do with Christian living.

To be sure, it also has to do with speaking. For no sooner has Paul said, "Be filled with the
Spirit," than he goes on to add, "speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vv. 19-20). But it is ethical, too. Being

filled with the Spirit is contrasted with being drunk with wine. That kind of filling, along with the debauchery associated with it, was characteristic of the culture in which the Ephesian Christians lived. Besides, the exhortation is immediately followed by much practical instruction, including the way in which husbands and wives are to live together within a Christian marriage, the necessity for children to obey their parents, the duties of servants, Christian warfare with Satan, and the ministry of intercessory prayer. The context leads us to think of the fruit of the Spirit as that is detailed for us in the letter to the Galatians: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfullness, gentleness, self-control" (5:22-23).

We may divide the results of the fullness of the Spirit as portrayed in Ephesians 5 into two parts, as Stott does in his handling of the passage. There is the part directed toward God, which includes both worship and testimony, and there is the part directed toward man expressed in godly living and fellowship. Writes Stott, "It is in these spiritual qualities and activities, not in supernatural phenomena, that we should look for evidence of the Holy Spirit's fullness." He concludes by noting that this is always "the apostle's emphasis when he is dealing with the subject in the Corinthian, Galatian and Ephesian epistles."

How to Be Filled

Having distinguished between the "baptism" of the Spirit and the "filling" or "fullness" of the Spirit, and having described what the fullness of the Holy Spirit means, we come to the practical question: How then may I be filled with the Spirit? What is my responsibility? What are the steps? If we turn to the Bible for the answers, as we are wise to do, we find that there are three conditions for filling. First, we must not "put out the Spirit's fire" (1 Thess. 5:19). Second, we must not "grieve" the Spirit (Eph. 4:30). Third, we must "live by" the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). The first two are important, but negative. The third is the most important of the three.

No one can say how this will work out in every case, for God's people are different and function differently. But it will at least mean that you

will want to keep short accounts with God. Perhaps you will begin each day with a brief thanksgiving for a good night's sleep and a request for guidance in the day's activities. Following the rush of breakfast you may review the day with God as you ride to your job or work in your home. As problems come up throughout the day, you will take these to him, sometimes in brief prayers (for we do not always have a great deal of time to pray when we are working), and you will ask for his direction and the ability to live as the Lord Jesus Christ would do in that situation. At night you will read the Bible and pray. If you are part of a family, you will pray together, talking about the events of the day in the light of God's Word. Finally, before you retire for the night, you will commit the day to God and confess known sin or shortcomings to him. Then you will rest, knowing that he will watch over you and your loved ones.

This means that you will walk with God the Holy Spirit as surely as if he were a visible person accompanying you throughout your day, and you will draw on his strength and counsel. If you will do this—yield to him, confess known sin, and obey him moment by moment—then he will fill you and make you a faithful witness to the Lord.

Chapter 186.
Gifts and Fruit

John 14:16-18

A number of years ago, when Christian bumper stickers had just become popular, a Christian drove up behind a car whose bumper had the sign: "Honk if you know Jesus." He had never seen a sign like this before but thought it was a cute idea. So he blew his horn, expecting the driver in front to wave, smile, or show a "one way" sign. Instead, the driver rolled down the window and shouted back. "Stop blowing your blankety-blank horn. Can't you see I'm waiting for a red light?"

The story is funny because we recognize that, if a person claims to be a Christian, then a certain standard of conduct may be expected of him. We do not expect him to be perfect, but we do expect him to show some of the fruit of Christian character exemplified so noticeably by the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wrote of it in his letter to the Galatians: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). We are right to expect this, for one of the goals of the Holy Spirit of God, by whom one becomes a Christian, is to reproduce this character, the character of the Lord Jesus Christ, within us. We touched on this in our second study of the Holy Spirit, for there we saw that one way in which the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ is by reproducing the character of Christ within the individual believer. The subject is related to our third study also, for if we are filled with the Spirit, then we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5:16); rather, the fruit of the Spirit will abound.

One Fruit

The most important thing that can be said about the fruit of the Spirit is that it is *one* fruit and that it is therefore to be present in its entirety within each Christian. That is why the word is singular ("fruit") instead of plural ("fruits"). This is not true of the "gifts" of the Spirit to which we come next, for they are given to one or another Christian by the Spirit as the Spirit wills. Thus, one may be a teacher, another a pastor, still another an evangelist, and so on. There are different gifts; no one possesses them all. By contrast, each and every Christian is to possess all the Spirit's fruit. The reason for this is in the nature of the fruit itself, for when we ask, "But what is this fruit?" the fullest answer is that it is simply the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ in his followers. Christ cannot be divided, nor can the likeness of Christ. So if Christ is present within, the character of Christ will begin to show itself in its fullness.

1. It is appropriate that *love* should lead the list of the Spirit's fruit; for "God is love" (1 John 4:8), and the greatest of all Christian virtues is love (1 Cor. 13:13). Divine love gives this word its character; for God's love is great (Eph. 2:4), unmerited (Rom. 5:8),

transforming (Rom. 5:5), and unchangeable (Rom. 8:35-39). God's love sent Christ to die for our sin. Now, because the Spirit of Christ, which is characterized by love, is implanted within the Christian, the believer is to show a great, transforming, sacrificial, and unmerited love both to other Christians and to the world. It is by this that the world is to know that Christians are indeed Christ's followers (John 13:35).

2. *Joy* is the virtue that corresponds in the Christian life to mere happiness. On the surface they are related. But happiness is dependent on circumstances—when fortunate circumstances are removed happiness is removed with them—while joy is not thus dependent. A Christian can be joyful, therefore, even in the midst of great suffering.

3. *Peace* is God's gift to mankind, achieved by him at the cross of Christ. Before the cross we were at enmity with God. Now we are at peace, God having made peace with us. We are to show the effects of that peace in all circumstances through what we would call "peace of mind" (Phil. 4:6-7). It is to reign in the home (1 Cor. 7:12-16), between the Jew and the Gentile (Eph. 2:1417), within the church (Eph. 4:3; Col. 3:15), and in the relationships of the believer with all men (Heb. 12:14).

4. *Patience* is the virtue of putting up with others, even when that virtue is severely tried. It is often used of God who shows great patience in his dealings with fallen and rebellious men and women.

5. *Kindness* is that attitude out of which God acts toward men. If the Christian is to be kind, he must act toward others as God has acted toward him.

6. *Goodness* is similar to kindness, but it is most often reserved for situations in which the recipient does not merit the goodness. It is linked to generosity.

7. *Faithfulness* is trustworthiness or reliability. This virtue involves truth which in turn is part of the character of God. It is the virtue

that will make a servant of Christ die rather than renounce his profession or, to put it on a less exalted plane, will make him suffer great inconvenience rather than go back on his word. The one who is faithful will do what he says he will do; and he will not quit when the going gets tough. This word is also descriptive of the character of Christ, the faithful witness (Rev. 1:5), and of God the Father who always acts thus in regard to his people (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:13; 1 Thess. 5:24; 2 Thess. 3:3).

8. *Gentleness* is the virtue of the man who is so much in control of himself that he is always angry at the right time (as against sin) and never angry at the wrong time. It was the preeminent virtue of Moses, who is praised for being the meekest man who ever lived (Num. 12:3).

9. The final manifestation of the Spirit's fruit is *self-control,* the quality that gives victory over fleshly desires and that is therefore closely related to chastity both of mind and conduct. Barclay notes that it "is that great quality which comes to a man when Christ is in his heart, that quality which makes him able to live and to walk in the world, and yet to keep his garments unspotted from the world."

Fruitful Christians

What makes the difference between a fruitful Christian and a nonfruitful one or, as we may also say, between one who produces the fruit of the Spirit and one who exhibits only the works of the flesh? One answer to that question is suggested by the image of fruit bearing. Here we turn to John 15 in which the Lord Jesus Christ says to his disciples, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.... Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (vv. 1-2, 4-5). This answer has three parts.

First, in order to be fruitful, the branch, which bears the fruit, must be attached to the vine. That is, it must be *alive* and not merely a dead piece of wood. In spiritual terms this means that the individual must first of all be a Christian. Without the life of Christ within only the acts of the sinful nature are possible: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies,, and the like (Gal. 5:19-21). The fruit of the Spirit becomes possible when the life of Christ, conveyed by the Spirit of Christ, flows through the Christian.

Second, there must be *cultivation.* This is the point of the opening statement in which Christ terms the Father "the gardener." This means that God cares for us, exposing us to the sunshine of his presence, enriching the soil in which we are planted, and seeing to it that we are protected from spiritual drought. If we would be fruitful, we must therefore stay close to God through prayer, feed on his Word, and keep close company with other Christians.

Finally, there must be *pruning.* This can be unpleasant at times, for it means that things we treasure will be removed from our lives. Sometimes it may involve suffering. But there is a purpose in the pruning, and that makes all the difference. The purpose is to bring forth more fruit in our lives. William Fitch has written on this theme, "Pruning is an art which only a great master can really employ; and God is such an artist. He knows the branches in each bush that are not bearing fruit. He cuts them down. We should be grateful for such wonderful care. He never gives up. He is determined that his children should 'grow in grace' and that thereby they should manifest the fruit of Christian grace in all its purity and glory. So the heavenly husbandman works with us, cleanses us, prunes where necessary, and plants a crop. Do we flinch? Perhaps, but we do not lose courage when we know that there is a purpose in our pain."

Gifts of the Spirit

But God does more than simply work from within us as individuals. He also surrounds us with external helps, especially in the form of Christian ministries. These are the gifts of the Spirit. So the gifts of the Spirit (as well as the fruit of the Spirit) must be studied. There are three major New Testament passages in which these gifts are discussed: Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12 (the gift of tongues is discussed more fully in chapter 14); and Ephesians 4:7-16.

The first thing we notice as we look at these chapters is that *the gifts mentioned vary* from passage to passage. For example, only two gifts occur in all three chapters: the gift of prophecy (meaning "proclamation") and the gift of teaching. These were obviously of crucial importance in Paul's thinking. The gift of being an apostle is mentioned in two places, in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11. Some of the gifts may be different ways of speaking the same thing, as "contributing to the needs of others" (Rom. 12:8) and "those able to help others" (1 Cor. 12:28). But aside from these few repetitions and possible exceptions, all the gifts—there are at least twenty of them—are different. In other words, the emphasis of the passages is not upon a certain list of gifts that are always to be present within the church at any period of its history or in any given locality, but rather upon the fact that the Holy Spirit will give whatever gifts the church needs at whatever period of its history.

Obviously, some of the gifts will always be present, the gifts of evangelism, teaching, faith, wisdom, and helps, for example. They are involved in the nature of what the church is to be. A second class of gifts, like the gift of apostleship, will cease. Still others, like the gifts of healing or tongues, may or may not be present. The list is not the most important thing. The point rather is that we can be sure that the Holy Spirit will give what the church needs.

The second thing we notice as we read these chapters is that, although not all persons have the same gifts, nevertheless *each believer has at least one.* This is not as clear as the fact that the gifts vary; but it is true nevertheless, as a careful reading shows. Thus, Paul writes to all the believers at Rome, saying, "We have different gifts, according to the

grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach..." and so on (12:6-7). The implication is that we each have a gift and are to use it. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians Paul writes, "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the *common good*" (12:7). Again, "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to *each one,* just as he determines" (v. 11).

This truth is of great importance, for it introduces us to our personal responsibility. If the gifts of the Spirit were not given to every Christian, we might be permitted to take our ease, assuming that we have not been given a gift and thus are not needed. But since this is not true, since God has given each a gift, we obviously are needed; and the work that God intends to be done will suffer if we neglect to use what has been entrusted to us.

The third emphasis of these three chapters dealing with the gifts of the Spirit is upon *the unity of the church.* Gifts that are truly God-given and are being exercised in the service of good will unite rather than divide Christ's body. This emphasis is clear in every passage, but especially in 1 Corinthians 12 where it occurs throughout. It is stressed there because an unspiritual emphasis upon certain gifts was tending to divide the church at Corinth.

The fourth emphasis is upon the major purpose of the gifts, which is *to build up the church* and *to equip it for service.* Here the Ephesians text is most explicit: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for words of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13). The church is a complex organism. It needs many things to grow and be healthy, just as our bodies need many kinds of food and exercise to grow strong. If a body receives only starches, it will get fat. If it gets only physical exercise, the muscles will grow strong but the mind will be a pygmy by proportion. The body has a variety of needs, and a balance of services is

indicated. In the same way, the body of Christ has varied needs. And God, who cares for that body, has seen to it that the necessary variety of gifts is distributed among the Lord's followers.

It is always sad when everyone in a particular church wants to be an evangelist, or a Bible teacher, or an administrator. At times one of these may be more greatly needed than at another, and many may be raised up to meet that need. But in a normal situation many gifts are present and in a balanced proportion. So we must not try to have the other Christian's gift, if we do not have it. We must simply try to be faithful in exercising our own gift and in helping others use what God has given them.

God Pleased

Years ago, when I was just a small boy and there were only two grandchildren in my grandmother's family, this grandmother (who lived in Florida) planted two small orange trees in her front yard. One was for me, and the other was for my cousin. I seldom saw those trees, for my family lived up north. But every year at Christmastime my grandmother would send me a bushel of oranges from my tree to me and another bushel of oranges from the other tree to my cousin. She said it was to show how nice the weather was in Florida and to encourage us to come and visit her. Well, I cannot adequately tell you what an interest I had in my tree. It was mine, and thus I was very interested in the number and the quality of the oranges it produced. I was proud when they were good oranges. I was disappointed when the tree began to produce fewer oranges (as it did in later years) and also when the oranges were stunted by frost or some other hindrance to their proper development.

In the same way, I am convinced that God the Father looks upon us, his children, with special concern, and is particularly pleased when we are really fruitful. God has provided for us amply in all we need. We must determine to yield to him and walk in the Spirit.

Chapter 187.
What about Tongues?

John 14:16-18

The verses from John 14, which have been our jumping-off place for these studies of the Holy Spirit, do not say a word about tongues as one of the Spirit's gifts to the church. This in itself is significant. But it is almost impossible to speak about the Holy Spirit today without giving at least some consideration to the tongues question. What are we to think of the tongues phenomena? Is it of God? Of the devil? Or is it merely self-induced by those who claim to have had the experience? If it is not of God, what shall we do about it? If it is, what should be its place within the life and experience of the Christian and of Christian churches? Obviously these questions are of great importance if only because of the great increase in the influence of Pentecostalism in twentiety-century Christianity. In some form or other, Pentecostalism has always been with us, but the modern movement arose from an experience with tongues by Charles Parham, dating from a New Year's Eve service in the year 1900. Following his experience, Parham became an evangelist of the Pentecostal message, and the movement spread rapidly, as a result of which the Pentecostal Assemblies, the Assemblies of God, and the Churches of God were founded. These denominations proclaimed a strong dose of biblical theology and grew continually. Today they are rightly recognized as a "third force" in Christendom; in some areas, such as South America, they are dominant. The new element, since 1950, has been the surprising impact of Pentecostalism on mainline churches.

A Sovereign God

What are we to say of this phenomenon? The one thing we must always say is that the sovereign God of the Bible can do anything he chooses and that, if this means "tongues," so be it. We cannot say that (because

"the age of tongues has ended," for example) God cannot give the tongues gift today.

Some have tried to say this on the basis of 1 Corinthians 13:8 which reads: "Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away." But to do this is to misuse the text. If the verse is to be taken to mean that the gift of tongues must cease in this current church age, then obviously the gift of knowledge must cease too, for the verse says equally emphatically, "Where there is knowledge, it will pass away." Actually, the verses are looking ahead to the time of Christ's return and are warning that all limited experiences of this present day shall pass when, in that day, we are made like Jesus. This is the point of 1 Corinthians 13:10: "But when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears." Nothing in this passage can be taken to say that tongues have been ruled out by God, with the result that anything passing for the gift of tongues today is either a self-induced psychological phenomenon or demonic.

At the same time we must also say that just because God can do anything does not mean that he has therefore done it, at least in every situation. Or, to put it in slightly different terms, it does not mean that everything that claims to be of the Spirit of God is therefore of God.

1 Corinthians 12, 14

Here we must turn to Scripture, for it is the explicit teaching of the Word of God, not experience (however valid or invalid), which must govern our thinking. On this question, the obvious passages are those from 1 Corinthians in which the apostle Paul deals at length with the issue. Significantly, we notice that he does not condemn the phenomenon. He might have, for the practice of speaking in tongues had proved divisive and Paul was obviously trying to overcome this tendency. Yet he does not condemn it. In fact, he acknowledges that he himself had spoken in tongues, adding "more than all of you" (1 Cor. 14:18).

In reading through these important chapters of 1 Corinthians (chapters 12 and 14) we notice six principles.

The first principle can be seen in 1 Corinthians 12:1-3. It is the principle that *the gift of tongues can be counterfeited*. That is, there is a genuine gift; but there is also a duplication of that gift by other spirits, whether the spirit is of Satan or merely the spirit of the individual. This is certainly
what Paul is talking about when he reminds the Corinthian Christians that before their conversions they were "led astray to mute idols," and warns them that it is necessary to test the spirits on the basis of their confession or lack of confession of Christ: "No one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (v. 3). Apparently the Christians at Corinth had been fooled by the ecstatic utterances of pagan priests before their conversion to Christ. Now they were being fooled by some who professed to speak in the power of the Holy Spirit but were not actually empowered by him.

It is worth noting that in many parts of the world, glossolalia (speaking in tongues) is known in non-Christian circles even today. Buddhist and Shintoist priests speak in tongues when in a trance. The phenomenon exists in much of South America, India, and Australia in a variety of non-Christian environments. So the mere speaking in tongues is in itself no proof of the Holy Spirit's presence.

An example may be of help here. In his excellent book on the Holy Spirit, William Fitch reports the experience of Raymond W. Frame, a member of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship in China. A gifted Chinese preacher had come to Shanghai where, because of his gifts, including his fluency in speaking in tongues, he made quite an impression. Some of his utterances, together with an interpretation by another Chinese Christian, had been recorded, however. And it seemed, as Mr. Frame studied the recordings, that some of the statements in the interpretations were contradictory. He decided to "test the spirit" in line with Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 12:3. Thus, when the Chinese preacher was again giving his message in an unknown tongue, the

missionary asked, "Thou spirit, speaking in an unknown tongue, do you confess that Jesus is the

Christ come in the flesh?"

At first the spirit in the preacher seemed to disregard the question completely. But as the question was repeatedly pressed, a note of clear irritation came into the speaker's voice. At last there was an angry outburst in a dialect of Chinese that was understandable: "Why do you not believe? Do you not know that I have come to do a great work?" Then there was a burst of laughing. Not once did the spirit in the preacher confess Christ. As a result of this test, the preacher was branded a false prophet and put out of the church. He was also discredited among the other churches of Shanghai.

The second principle that Paul lays down is that *there are many different and valuable gifts of the Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues is just one.* He says this in verses 4-11 of chapter 12, stressing that there are different needs in the church and that it is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit to meet those needs by giving the necessary gifts to those whom he has called to work in those areas. "To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines" (vv. 8-11).

Why does Paul stress that it is by the *one* Spirit of God that the gifts are given? Apparently, to forestall pride. For if it is true that the Holy Spirit gives a gift to each Christian ("each one," v. 7) and that for his own purposes, then obviously we are unable to take pride in our particular gift over that given to another. The fact that Paul later minimizes the gift of tongues indicates that pride was a particular danger for those who possessed this gift at Corinth.

Growth and Unity

The third of Paul's points is that these gifts are for the *edification and unity of the church* (12:1227). It follows from this that if a particular exercise of the gift of tongues does not promote growth or, worse yet, if it leads to schism, then either the gift is not of God or it is being exercised in a way contrary to God's purposes for it.

A young man came to me with an interesting story. Two summers before, he had been active in a summer music camp sponsored by one of America's large universities. As a Christian he had longed for some effective Christian witness to the music students. So he was glad when, through the help of other Christian students and with the permission of the university officials, he was enabled to begin a Bible study group and a Sunday worship service. In his judgment these were quite effective. At any rate, a few of the students became Christians.

The following summer the work was begun anew and with high expectations, for the students had learned that the new conductor of the student orchestra was also a professing Christian. The young man who was telling me the story indicated that he had invited the conductor to the Bible study and the services and had asked him to take part. Unfortunately, the conductor did more than take part. He took over! Then he turned the meetings into an expression of worship in which many so-called "charismatic gifts" were evident. The effect, far from being good, was divisive. The fellowship of the Christians was destroyed. Many open doors were closed. Eventually, because of the excesses, university officials banned all Christian meetings from the summer campus. The conductor felt that he had been persecuted; and when the young man protested that he had carried on a Christian work for the whole preceding summer without any harassment, he was told that this was because he had not been sufficiently bold or spiritual in his testimony.

I was in no position to say that the efforts of the orchestra conductor were of the devil. They probably were not. But the gift, if it was a genuine gift of the Holy Spirit, was at least not being exercised

properly. It was divisive and far from edifying. By contrast, says Paul, the gifts of the Spirit are given to strengthen the church and unify it.

Fourth, Paul indicates (perhaps in this case to humble those who were boasting of their gift of tongues) that if the gifts are to be listed in the order of importance, *tongues will always come relatively low on the list* (12:28-14:12). This is most marked in 12:28, where Paul actually numbers the gifts: "And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues." In this list the gift of tongues falls in category five, and even in that category it is listed after healings, helps, and governments. A second way in which Paul makes this point is by his extensive emphasis upon the supreme importance of love. So great is his concern for this that he interrupts his discussion of the problems of gifts to give his great hymn on love, which is chapter 13 in our Bibles. Finally, he concludes that if any of the gifts are to be sought after, it is the gift of prophecy (by which he means the ability to preach and teach the word clearly) rather than the gift of tongues that is desirable (1 Cor. 14:1). He declares from his own case that, although he too speaks in tongues, he would rather speak five words in an intelligible language than ten thousand in an unknown tongue (14:19).

In our case, this would mean that it is far better to be able to present the gospel clearly to a person who is inquiring about it than be able to do any number of supposedly miraculous things that are not edifying.

Dangers and Safeguards

Paul's fifth principle is that *the gift of tongues is fraught with particular dangers* and must therefore be exercised with safeguards. He discusses these in verses 13-38 of the fourteenth chapter.

The first danger is the danger of confusion, or disorder. Paul does not want this, for he seems to regard it as a disgrace or at least an unprofitable thing for God's work to be done in a disruptive way. Here

he lays down guidelines. First, do not allow everyone to speak in church at the same time; they should speak one at a time. Second, do not allow everyone to speak, but at the most two or three. Third, do not permit even these to speak in tongues unless there is someone present who has the gift of interpretation and interprets them.

The second danger is the danger of a Christianity without content, which Paul counters by insisting on interpretation. Then as now, Christianity was threatened by an outlook that made experience central and content minor. In this approach the emotional "high" was everything. We see this often today in a kind of emotional Christianity in which experience is all that matters. In facing this, we must, as did Paul, emphasize content and then content again. Francis Schaeffer writes, "We must stress that the *basis* for our faith is neither experience nor emotion but the truth as God has given it in verbalized, propositional form in the Scripture and which we first of all apprehend with our minds—though, of course, the whole man must act upon it." John R. W. Stott argues similarly against what he terms "mindless Christianity."

There is one last point in Paul's discussion of tongues; we need to take note of it too. It is simply that, notwithstanding the dangers of this gift, *no Christian should forbid its exercise*. Specifically he says, 'Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues" (14:39). If tongues is not your gift, you are not to desire it—at least not more than any other gift, particularly the gift of prophecy. But, on the other hand, if another has been given the gift, you are not to forbid its exercise. Who are you to tell him that he cannot use what God has given? On the contrary, if God has truly given it, to forbid it would be to the church's impoverishment and hurt.

To Each a Gift

One final question: Can the exercise of tongues ever be wrong? The answer is yes, in several situations, including whenever Paul's guidelines in 1 Corinthians are disregarded. The practice is wrong when it is said that speaking in tongues is an essential evidence of the Spirit's

presence. It is wrong when Christians are told that, after their conversion, a further Spirit baptism is necessary. It is wrong when it is said to be essential to the fullness of God's work within an individual Christian. Above all it is wrong whenever it diverts attention from Jesus Christ, for it is the Spirit's work to point to and exalt him above all (John 16:13-16).

On the other hand, the dangers and errors in the exercise of this gift should not be an excuse for those who possess other gifts to neglect their exercise. That is a smugness and error of its own. What is your gift? Whatever it is, you are to use it. Is it prophecy? "If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith." Is it ministry? "If it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully" (Rom. 12:6-8). It is only as we do this that the church is edified, unbelievers won, and Christ fully glorified.

Chapter 188.
Four Promises

John 14:19-24

If you often have opportunity to comfort a child who has hurt himself while playing, you will readily understand the motives of the Lord Jesus Christ in this passage. Imagine that a child has injured himself and that he has come to you for comfort. The fact that he has come to you means much. Your presence is important. But beyond that there are also several practical things you can do. You can show love. That is, you can kiss the child and hold him in your arms. You can provide information, saying, "There, there, now. It is not really too bad. Look, it is not bleeding. It is only bruised." Or if it is serious, you can get him to the hospital. Finally, you can promise that things will be better. You can say, "Let's put some cold water on it. After that it will stop hurting.

Tomorrow it will be as good as new." Anyone who has ever comforted a child knows that in its proper place each of these three things is valuable and that, at least in many cases, the promises seem to be the most valuable of all.

In some sense this is what the Lord has been doing with his disciples in the chapter we have been studying. He had announced that he was departing from them in order to return to the Father, and this had upset them greatly, for he was everything to them. They were downcast, troubled, yes, even afraid. So he began to comfort them—by reassuring them of his love, by providing information, and by giving them some blessed promises. Probably it is the promises more than anything else that make this chapter such a favorite with Christian people.

What are these promises? There has been the promise that Jesus would prepare a place for his own in heaven and that, having prepared it, he would return again for them. He promised that his departure from them would not mean an end to Christian work. For if they truly believe on him, they will be able to carry on his works and, in fact, do even greater works than Jesus has done. He promised that he would answer prayer. And then, perhaps greatest of all, he told of the Holy Spirit whom he would send and who will abide with us forever. In the verses that follow, the verses that are our text, Jesus gives four more promises, all of which relate to his future relationship to the disciples.

The first is a fact: the resurrection. The second is a consequence of that fact: sure knowledge of him and of who he is. The third is a promise of a further revelation: he will manifest himself to them. Finally, there is an explanation of how that further revelation will be possible: by a mutual indwelling.

A Double Resurrection

The first of these promises is a promise of the coming resurrection, but it is cast in such language that it suggests a resurrection on several very important levels. For one thing, it obviously speaks of the resurrection of Jesus himself, for the promise is set in the context of the world no

longer seeing him (that is, because he will die) but of the disciples continuing to see him (that is, not only at the present moment but also after the resurrection). Jesus says, "Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live" (v. 19).

It is not only the resurrection of Jesus that is spoken of, however, for the last phrase, "you also will live," clearly speaks of their resurrection too. Moreover, since the verses go on to speak of the knowledge that they will have of him following the resurrection and that he will come to dwell within them, it is probably also true that Jesus is suggesting, not merely that they will be raised from the dead physically in some future day, but that they will also enter into the experience of resurrection life now. In other words, the promise is that they are to "come alive" in a new sense following Christ's resurrection.

This was a great promise, particularly to these who were so soon to be confronted with the cruel horror of Christ's death. What were they to think in that hour? They had placed their faith in Christ as the One who was indeed God's Messiah, the salvation of his people. But they had never understood the nature of the cross. With Jesus gone their hopes would be dashed. We would be right to think of them as disappointed, disillusioned, even cynical men. I catch a glimpse of that spirit in the reply of the Emmaus disciples—"We had *hoped* that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21)—and in the vigorous disbelief of Thomas—"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, *I will not believe if* (John 20:25).

Each of these statements arises out of cruel disillusionment, but it was to these men, soon to be struck by death's horror, that Christ makes this promise. "Death is not the end," he says, "not for me, not for you. Moreover, you do not even have to wait until the next life for the promise, for you will begin to enter into the reality of that life now."

Sure Knowledge

The second promise is the promise of certain knowledge of Christ based upon that double resurrection. It is because Jesus has been raised and because we have been given new life that we know him as being who he is. This is what he means when he says, "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father" (v. 20).

The content of this knowledge is that Jesus of Nazareth was God incarnate, that is, that he was fully divine. All else flows from this. And the basis of this knowledge, without which we do not and cannot know, is this double resurrection. On the one hand, it is based upon Christ's own resurrection. Without this there would have been no faith and no knowledge that he was indeed who he claimed to be. He claimed to be God. But if he had died only, no matter how selflessly or courageously, without the resurrection he would rightly be regarded as no more than a selfless and sincere man. He would have been a good teacher, a friend. But faith and knowledge would have stopped at that point. It was only when Christ was raised from the dead that his life was seen to be fully extraordinary and his daring claims vindicated. This is why Paul can refer to the resurrection as the greatest of all Christian evidences in the opening chapter of the Book of Romans, noting that Christ "was a descendent of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead" (1:3-4).

On the other hand, apart from a corresponding resurrection of spiritually dead men to spiritual life, even this great miracle is insufficient for bringing us to know who Christ is. It is only when God plants his own life within us, thereby enabling us to understand his truth and respond to Christ, that we truly know Christ and embrace him joyfully as the ground of our salvation.

Further Revelation

The third promise is a particularly important one, for it concerns Christ's continuing revelation of himself to those who have believed on him. He says, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the

one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him" (v. 21).

This is a step beyond the promise of sure knowledge of who he is, as a careful reading will show. The fact of his historical resurrection and of his gift of the Holy Spirit to us so that we can understand the gospel and believe on him is first in order and is important. But, having come to know who Jesus is and having believed on him, the Christian will then want to know him more fully. In this case, the knowledge will be not so much a knowledge *about* him, leading to faith, but rather a deep knowledge *of* him in which the disciple comes to experience the Lord in the fullest and most personal way. How would this be possible if it were not that Christ himself provides it? There would be no way in which we could know him fully as a living person and close friend. He is not here for us thus to know him. We cannot know him unless he reveals himself. But reveal himself is precisely what he does. The verses that come at the end of this section even go on to say that in the future period of the Spirit's full activity the disciples would come to know Jesus better even than in the days of his physical presence among them.

In what way does the Lord promise to manifest himself to the disciples and to those who follow them? Not bodily, obviously, for the entire point of the discourse is to prepare them for his physical departure. He is not going to manifest himself to them through visions either, for nothing in the Gospel would suggest this. How, then, would he be seen? The answer is that he would be seen in a spiritual sense, as through the revelation of himself in the Bible and through the Holy Spirit's witness to that revelation within the hearts of the disciples and of those who follow them, he is made vividly real. This sounds like fantasy to those who are not born again. But to those who have been made alive by God's Spirit the presence of Christ is more real than anything they can see physically, more real even than their own hands or feet.

"But I am a Christian, and yet Jesus is not that real to me," someone says. Yes, that may be true. But notice that, in the same verse in which Jesus gives the promise of a further revelation of himself, the Lord also gives the conditions upon which that continuing revelation will be

given. The conditions are (1) the keeping of his commandments and (2) love.

Have we met those conditions? We suppose, quite often I imagine, that it is possible to enjoy the fullness of the Christian life without a fervent love for Christ, or that it is possible to love without obeying him. We imagine that having been "justified by faith" we thereafter have no need for an obedient walk. But this is not true, and this verse alone should refute it. True, we are saved by faith, and we are to walk in the Christian life by love. But true love as well as true faith will inevitably express themselves in obedience. If they do not, they are not the love or faith about which we read in the Bible. What does it say in James? "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:17). What does 1 John say about this? "This is love for God: to obey his commands" (1 John 5:3). Only when these elements are fully present does Christ fully reveal himself to his disciple.

Here Arthur W. Pink writes wisely, "This manifestation of Christ is made only to the one who really loves Him, and the proof of love to Him is not by emotional displays but by submission to His will. There is a vast difference between sentiment and practical reality. The Lord will give no direct and special revelation of Himself to those who are in the path of *disobedience.* 'He that *hath* my commandments,' means, hath them at heart. 'And *keepeth* them,' that is the real test. We *hear,* but do we *heed*? We *know,* but are we *doing* His will?"

Many Christians would be willing to do spectacular things if by that means they could come to know Christ better. But they are unwilling to do the commonplace things that are involved in simple obedience. Will you do them? If you will, you will most certainly grow in God's grace. If you obey, Christ will increasingly unveil his heart to you. You will come to know him and not just about him. On the other hand, if you fail to obey, he will cease to reveal himself to you, and your own love for him will weaken.

Christ Within

Christ's final promise is found in verse 23. It is the promise of his own personal presence in the Christian through the Holy Spirit. He says, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (v. 23). The meaning of this is found in his earlier reference to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in which he promised that the Spirit would come to live within each Christian (v. 17).

This was something entirely new at the time Christ promised it. The idea that the Spirit of God would be *with* God's people was not new, for that had been true through all the centuries of the Old Testament dispensation. The Holy Spirit was with Noah in his day, because Peter tells us that the Spirit enabled him to preach while the ark was being prepared (1 Peter 3:18-20). The Spirit was with each of the Hebrew patriarchs. He was with the people of Israel during the days of their wandering in the wilderness. David prayed, "Take not your Holy Spirit from me"—a prayer that was proper for his time but that is not appropriate for a child of God during the church age. In each of these cases the Spirit of God was *with* his people. But now Jesus declares that the One who had been with them in the past was, in a much better way, to be *in* them in the future. Moreover, since he would be in them it is proper to say that the Father and Son would be in them also.

The presence of the Lord within his people is the glorious distinctive of the present time. Therefore, in this age we do not need to go to God and ask that the Spirit be given. He has been given to each of Christ's followers. Rather, it is for us to recognize his indwelling and then allow him to have his way with our lives.

Judge or Savior

Here are four great promises: that we will be made alive spiritually and will be raised as Jesus was raised, that we will know him as God, that we will receive an increasingly full revelation of him (if we continue to obey him and grow in his love), and that he will come to dwell within us by his Holy Spirit. Some of these promises are more or less automatic; that is, they are the product of pure grace and are fulfilled in

us regardless of our response or obedience. One promise, the promise of a fuller revelation of Christ, is contingent; it depends upon our obedience and growth in love. What then? Shall we accept the three promises and neglect the one? Shall we neglect the one that is costly? Or shall we rather determine to pursue that promise at all costs, knowing that as we do we will be coming to know that One who is altogether lovely and who out of his great love gave himself for us? To do anything less would be ingratitude and folly. It would be to exchange our spiritual birthright for a mess of worldly pottage.

To those who are not yet Christians, it must be said that although Jesus speaks of an age, this age, when the world will no longer see him, it is nevertheless true that the world will yet see him one day when he is exalted on his throne to render judgment on all because of their misdeeds. You will see him as judge, if you will not see him now. If you see him as judge, it will be to receive his just punishment upon you for your sins. Why wait for his judgment? How much wiser to run to him now, while he is still offered to you as the ground of salvation, and say, "Lord Jesus Christ, I confess my sin; I want you to be my Savior."

Chapter 189.
The Holy Spirit As Teacher

John 14:25-26

John 14:26 is the shortest of those sections of the final discourses dealing with the Holy Spirit, yet it is probably true that it gives us the fullest definition. The Holy Spirit is described as the "Counselor." We have already seen what this means in our discussion of verses 16-18. He is described as being "holy"—the *Holy* Spirit. Finally, he is described as being a "teacher." Here are three definitions: the Counselor, Holy One, and Teacher. Yet when the verse is looked at closely, it is undoubtedly the last of these, the fact that the Holy Spirit is a teacher, that is emphasized. The role of the Holy Spirit as Counselor is emphasized in the earlier verses. The matter of holiness is emphasized in 16:7-11. But

here (as also at 15:26-27 and 16:12-15) the special ministry of the Spirit as teacher is brought forward.

When the Lord says that the Holy Spirit is to "teach *you* all things," the reference is primarily to the apostles. These were those whom Jesus had chosen to be authoritative spokesmen for the truth he had revealed. They were to remember it and then record it in the pages of what has become the New Testament. Moreover, this teaching was to become normative for the church. This same idea is clear in that verse in which the Lord says, "When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all [the] truth." Jesus did not mean that all that could possibly be known would be revealed to them. All things that can possibly be known are known only to God. But he did mean that the Holy Spirit would reveal to them the full truth of the gospel centered in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. And this he did. This was a unique ministry of the Holy Spirit to the apostles.

At the same time, however, there is a secondary sense in which these words apply to Christians who are living today. The Holy Spirit teaches us as well, and the Holy Spirit is the One who brings these things to our remembrance.

Need for Teaching

We need to look at the disciples first, however. Clearly, here were men who needed to be taught. They had been with the Lord Jesus Christ for three years. One might think that they would have understood the essence of his ministry and the gospel. He had spoken to them about these things. But the truth is that, although he had spoken to them about this, nevertheless they had not understood him. It is significant that verse 25 says, "All this I have spoken while still with you." He had spoken to them, but that is not quite the same thing as saying that he had taught them. Obviously he had tried to teach the disciples, and had taught them many other things, but they had not yet really learned the great truths of the gospel. Actually, they were confused men who needed the Holy Spirit's teaching.

They also had a particular problem with learning in this instance, for the Lord had announced his departure to them, and this had so seized upon their minds that they were not really hearing what he was saying. He had spoken about another Counselor, but they were not interested enough in the other Counselor even to learn about him. All they could grasp was that Jesus was to be taken from them.

So the Lord tells the disciples, "You need teaching; you really do. You have heard a lot, but you do not understand it. You need to be taught. I am going. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit is coming, and one of his roles (a very important role) is to teach you."

The second interesting thing about the teaching of the Holy Spirit is that God himself earnestly wanted to teach the disciples. We see this in the fact that the entire Trinity is mentioned in this verse: "But the Counselor, the *Holy Spirit,* whom the *Father* will send in *my* name, will teach you." In other words, the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is sending the Holy Spirit to teach the disciples, so much is he interested in having them come to the knowledge of the truth concerning Jesus.

I suppose that if we had been the Lord Jesus Christ, we might have said at this point, "Oh, these dull, dull disciples!" We could even have boasted about the quality of our instruction. We could have said, "It is impossible to imagine a better teacher than they have just had. Furthermore, they have gone through an entire seminary course in three years and have combined formal teaching with on-the-field experience. They have had the advantage of a first-class example. So if they still do not get it, I will flunk them." We might have said that. But this is not the attitude of God. The God who recognizes, on the one hand, that the disciples needed teaching, is the same God who, on the other hand, sends the Holy Spirit in order that they might be taught.

If we ask at that point, "Were they taught?" the answer is yes; of course they were. The proof of it is our Bible. Furthermore, once the Holy Spirit had come, they began to get it quickly, because on the day of Pentecost, Peter, who on an earlier occasion had said when the Lord

announced his crucifixion, "Far be it, Lord, that such a thing should happen to you," who did not understand Jesus at all, this same Peter stood up and announced with great understanding that what had occurred in Jerusalem six weeks before had been by the foreordination of God. In other words, the crucifixion of Christ had fallen out in accordance with God's perfect plan and was the heart of redemption. Then Peter preached Christ to the very men who had crucified him, and the Holy Spirit blessed the message so that many came to faith on that occasion. The disciples did learn through the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Holy Spirit guided them to write these things in the books that became our New Testament.

These books record what the Lord Jesus Christ said and did, explain it, and draw conclusions. In this sense the critics are right when they say that these books are not pure biography, that is, objective historical biography. They are biography with an interpretation attached. But the interpretation, as well as the biography, is that which the Holy Spirit gave.

Our Teacher Too

All this applies primarily to the disciples, but it also comes down to us in a much closer way. For we need to be taught also, and the Holy Spirit, who taught the disciples, is our teacher as well.

Paul writes about it to the Corinthians. He talks first of the fact that in ourselves we are unable to understand spiritual truth, even when it is recorded in the pages of Scripture. But he tells us in addition that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, who inspired the Bible, speaks from its pages to bring us understanding. "As it is written, 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him'—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we many understand what God has freely given us. This is

why we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words" (1 Cor. 2:9-13).

Here the ministry of the Holy Spirit as teacher is explained. It was exercised, in the first instance, when God revealed truth to the apostles and they recorded it in what would later become canonized as the pages of the New Testament. It is then exercised, in the second instance, when this same Holy Spirit teaches us from the truths that they have recorded.

Remembering

The first part of John 14:26 speaks of the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, but there is a second part that speaks of remembrance. "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and *remind* you of everything I have said to you." Why, if they were taught all things, does anything need to be brought back to mind? As we begin to reflect on this word, we see that a ministry of the Holy Spirit in helping us remember is necessary because of what we are like and because of the inability of our minds to retain important teachings. It is possible to be well taught, even brilliantly taught, and still forget; or, in the disciples' case, to be taught the meaning of Christ's ministry but forget that upon which it is based.

The Lord's emphasis on remembering teaches us two separate truths. First, it teaches us that the wisdom of God is not a new thing. It is that which God has revealed in the past and that is the same because he is the same. We have a tendency, especially in America and in our age, always to be inventing theology. Churchmen speak about "process theology" today. It means "evolving" theology. But this is not the outlook of the Scriptures. Some of our contemporaries seem always to be searching the Bible in the light of newspapers and popular books in order to come up with something that no one has ever heard before. When they do and when they write a book about it, they get a hearing. This is the nature of *The Passover Plot*, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, and some other popular religious books. People buy them and say, "We never heard that before! Therefore, it must be true!" But it is

not true, nor is it a product of the Holy Spirit's ministry. The Holy Spirit does not give us new doctrines. Rather, he brings old truths to our remembrance.

So what we preach is not new doctrine but the old doctrine once and for all delivered to the saints. It is the doctrine of man's total inability to help himself spiritually, God's grace in Jesus Christ, the ministry of the Holy Spirit who takes these truths and brings them home to our hearts and minds so that we understand them, and God's unfailing perseverance with his people. We preach that God does not abandon us, that God who has begun to save us in such a marvelous way, giving us a new spirit and creating a new soul, will persevere to the end, at which time he will give us a new body and make us like the Lord Jesus Christ forevermore. These are not new doctrines. They are old doctrines. They are the doctrines that the Holy Spirit brings to our remembrance.

The second truth the word "remind" teaches is that we tend to forget these doctrines, even though we have heard them many times. The history of the church is the history of great blessing through the Holy Spirit, a time of reformation and revival, followed by a gradual forgetting of the message. This happens again and again; so one of the jobs of the minister is to remind the congregation of the old truths. One of the jobs of Christian people is to remind each other of them, and one of the jobs of the Christian church is to remind the world of these old doctrines, even though the world may reject them.

He Shall Testify of Me

This verse also says something else, and we do not want to miss that either. It says that the object of the teaching is Christ. This is true in this text: "He will remind you of everything I have said to you." It is also true in the verses about the Holy Spirit in John 15 and 16: "When the Counselor comes, whom I well send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about *me*. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning" (15:26-27). "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all

truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is *mine* and making it known to you" (16:12-14).

We have a danger, even as evangelical people, of making the Scriptures an end in themselves. We study the Bible as we would a textbook. We memorize the data. But we are always in danger of forgetting that the purpose of the Scriptures is not to exist as an end in themselves, though they will endure forever—"heaven and earth will pass away, but my word will not pass away"— but to reveal Christ to the seeking heart and mind.

God's Power

There is a final point that belongs with what we have been saying. The Holy Spirit is also the One who enables us to teach these truths to others. Teaching spiritual truths cannot be done in the power of the flesh. Paul writes about it in 1 Corinthians in the verses that come just before the ones cited earlier. "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.... My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (2:1-2, 4).

Three things are necessary if God's truth is to be properly communicated. First, there must be the revelation of the truth to the apostles by the Holy Spirit. This has been done. Second, there must be the teaching of the Holy Spirit to our hearts, so that, as we read their words, we come face-toface with the Lord Jesus Christ about whom they wrote. Third, there must be the continuing work of the Holy Spirit to take our testimony concerning this Word and carry it home to the hearts of those who have not yet heard or understood it. Three stages!

But there can be error in each. There are some who do not begin with the Scriptures. They consider the Bible to contain the words of men rather than the very words that the Holy Ghost taught to the apostles.

Having thrown out the base, they have nothing on which to stand, and their theology becomes mere speculation. There are others who accept the Bible as the Word of God but who do not allow the Holy Spirit to teach them. They study the Bible in an academic way. Although they may have a high doctrine of Scripture, they do not strive to see the Lord Jesus Christ in its pages. Then there are those who accept the Bible as the Word of God and who do meet with Jesus Christ, but they testify in their own power in a way that brings glory to themselves, and few are won.

We do a farmer's work. First, we prepare the soil. Then we take a seed and plant it. We water it, and we wait for it to grow. But we do not give life to the seed. The seed already has life in it. Moreover, we can scratch a furrow and put the seed in it, but the ground must have the nutrients that God has placed there. And even then the work of God is not finished, for the seed will not grow unless the sun shines upon it. The Holy Spirit must be the sun in our witnessing. We must be faithful in scratching the furrows, watering, even pulling out weeds. But we must look to God to give life.

Chapter 190.
Peace Casting Out Fear

John 14:27-31

In a sense John 14:27-31 introduces us to an entirely new subject, for this is the first mention of peace in Christ's final discourses. Still, it is not totally unexpected. For one thing, peace is a natural result of the coming of the Holy Spirit to Christ's followers, a matter of which he has just spoken. The apostle Paul tells us that one aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is peace (Gal. 5:22). Furthermore, it is—like Christ's promise of a place prepared for his own in heaven, his return, the fact that his work in them and through them would continue, his pledge to answer their prayers, and the sending of the Holy Spirit to be with them forever—a

great reason why they should be comforted. These words even pick up the opening theme of the chapter, reading in this case, "Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid" (v. 27).

This final reason why the disciples are not to be troubled is that Jesus is leaving his peace with them. And if this is so, peace is presented somewhat as Christ's dying bequest to his followers. It is his legacy to them. He is not leaving them destitute or without comfort. True, he is leaving, but he is leaving his peace behind.

Peace in Storm

The beautiful nature of the peace that Christ bequeaths becomes apparent only when we notice the troublesome circumstances out of which these words were spoken and the condition of those to whom Christ's peace was given. It was not a situation marked by outward peace. Christ spoke on the verge of his violent execution. Nor did he speak to those who were already at peace or who were untouched by his imminent arrest and crucifixion. On the contrary, they were already deeply distressed and fearful. Troubles without! Troubles within! It was in this situation that the legacy was given.

The story has occasionally been told of a contest in which artists were to submit paintings and sculptures portraying their understanding of peace. Some showed beautiful sunsets, others pastoral scenery. But the prize went to an artist who had painted a bird in its nest, attached to a branch protruding from the edge of a thundering waterfall. This is the idea involved in Christ's legacy. In times of outward peace anyone can be at peace, or at least many can. But it takes an exceptional peace, a supernatural peace, to prevail in the midst of great outward trouble and inner distress. Christ's peace is just that, exceptional and supernatural. As he explains in these verses, it is a peace that is to be present in his own in spite of the vacillating nature of the world around them, his own absence, and the vigorous activity of the devil and evil persons.

A Vacillating World

The peace that Christ gives is peace in spite of the world's vacillation. We see it in the contrast between the way in which the world gives and the way in which Jesus gives. He spoke of it saying, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."

What is it that characterizes the world's gifts, whatever they may be? *Insincerity* characterizes them. People give, but seldom with motives as high as the gift is supposed to represent. Sometimes the gift is presented only because the gift is expected. *Impotence* also characterizes our giving. That is, even when we are sincere about something, we are nevertheless generally unable to do all that we might like to do. If we wish someone peace, our wish is at best still merely a wish; it does not in itself accomplish anything. The world also gives *scantily.* That is, it always gives less than it could give. This is particularly evident in giving to charitable causes. The world gives with a *selfish motive.* Sometimes this is to be well thought of. Sometimes it is to receive a favor back again. Most objectionable of all perhaps is that the world gives, for the most part, *to those who do not need or do not want the gift.* Most giving is to one's friends, who already have what they need, or to those who are imagined to be rich or important. In addition to all these characteristics, it is also often the case that the world gives but then *takes back again.*

This is not like Christ's giving. He gives sincerely out of a genuine love for his own, effectively, bountifully, at great personal cost (for his gift of peace cost him the cross), and above all to those who clearly need his gift. In the Bible peace is a positive blessing, particularly a right relationship with God from which all other good things follow.

Harry Ironside used to tell this story. At the close of the Civil War, a troop of Federal cavalry were riding along a road between Richmond, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. Suddenly they saw a poor wretch of a soldier, clothed in the ragged remnants of a Confederate uniform, coming out of the bush. He called to the captain of the cavalry unit who drew in and waited for him. "Can you help me?" the soldier called out. "I am starving to death. Can you give me some food?"

"Starving to death?" questioned the captain. "Why don't you just go into Richmond and get what you need?"

The soldier explained, "I do not dare go into Richmond because if I did I would be arrested. Three weeks ago I became so discouraged because of our losses that I deserted from the southern army, and I have been hiding in the woods ever since, gradually making my way north, hoping for a chance to break through to Federal lines. If I should be caught by southern soldiers, I would be shot for deserting the army in time of war." The captain asked, "Haven't you heard the news?"

"What news?"

"Why, the war is over. Peace has been made. General Lee surrendered to General Grant at Appomattox two weeks ago. The Confederacy is ended."

"What!" said the soldier, "Peace has been made for two weeks, and I have been starving in the woods because I didn't know it?"

This is what it means to have peace with God. It means that the Lord Jesus Christ made peace nearly two thousand years ago for those who are given to him by the Father. They do not have to make their peace with God. Indeed, they could not do it even if they tried. They could not atone for their sins. But Jesus has provided the one perfect atonement so that all who will believe on him may come boldly to God knowing that the ground of hostility has been removed and that they may now find all they need in the storehouse of the Father's great bounty.

But that is only one half of the story, for, having found peace *with* God, these may now enter into the peace *of* God in abundance. What is this peace *of* God? It is the personal peace that Jesus had himself enjoyed while here on earth. Two things are characteristic of it. First, it is a peace based upon one's intimate knowledge of God, a God who is in control of all things. Second, this peace is entirely independent of circumstances. Circumstances raged around Jesus, but he was totally unruffled by them. His enemies foamed with rage in their passionate desire to kill him. But still he went his way, knowing that his life and

times were in the hands of a loving, wise, and allpowerful heavenly Father.

"My peace I give you." Have you received that peace? If not, you may ask God for it even as you lay your burden at his feet.

An Absent Christ

The peace about which Christ speaks is also to be present in spite of Christ's physical absence. This is the connection of verses 28 and 29 with the verse that precedes them, for Jesus now speaks of the fact that he is being taken from the disciples. "You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe."

There are two reasons why the disciples should be at peace even though Jesus was himself physically absent from them. First, because it would be better for Jesus. It would be better for him because he would again be with the Father. This, incidentally, is the true meaning of that sentence at the end of verse 28—"For my Father is greater than I." This has become a favorite verse with Unitarians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other cultists, who deny the deity of Jesus and who would therefore make him to be less than the Father. They use this sentence to teach that Jesus here confessed himself to be a lesser, created being, although an important one. But while this is the apparent meaning if the verse is looked at only on the surface, it is clearly not the meaning if it is looked at in context. The key word is the conjunction "for." Jesus has told the disciples that they should rejoice in view of his departure and in their love for him. He now gives the reason. "For," he says [that is "because"], "my Father is greater than I." In other words, in the days of his incarnation Jesus had been below the Father in terms of his outward glory and official position. But now he was returning to the Father to assume that great glory and position he had possessed originally. The disciples should rejoice in the exaltation of their Lord that was now in view.

This verse is really a parallel statement to that of Paul, recorded in Philippians 2:5-11. These verses speak of an original, fully divine glory and equality with God the Father possessed by Jesus that, however, he laid aside temporarily in order to become man and die for our salvation. "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jeus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (vv. 9-11). The disciples should recognize that it was better for Jesus that he go.

We ought to apply this to all who die in the Lord. It is true that they will not assume the same glory as Jesus—he is God and they are not—nevertheless, their death will mean their exaltation and perfection. For us their passing is loss. We miss them and are poorer for their death. On the other hand, we rejoice that they have completed their race and are now with Jesus, having been made like him.

The second reason why the disciples were to be at peace even though Jesus was to be taken from them is that the arrangement would be better for themselves. They could not really imagine anything better than having him physically with them. But Jesus repeatedly taught that it would be better for them to have him depart and have the Holy Spirit replace him. Why? Because then they would "believe" (v. 29). At the time he spoke these words the disciples undoubtedly thought they believed. At least they believed all they understood. But they did not understand the reason for his death. They did not understand that his death would be followed by his resurrection. They did not understand that the gospel of salvation founded upon these two great truths was to be preached throughout the whole world until Jesus should come again. It was the work of the Holy Spirit to lead them into an understanding of these great truths and cause them to believe them. Only when this had taken place would they become strong in the faith and be able to carry this same gospel to others.

This should be our faith also. Jesus was telling the disciples that whatever was coming, no matter how tragic it appeared, it was for their

own good—for their growth in faith and for blessing in their lives and the lives of others. So must it be for us all. Whatever disturbs us is sent by God for our good. So we should have peace, even in the most adverse circumstances.

An Active Devil

The last two verses of chapter 4 also relate to peace, for they indicate that the peace of Christ should be present even in the face of Satan's activities. Neither a vacillating world, an absent Christ, nor an active devil should upset us. Jesus is speaking of the latter when he announces, "I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me" (vv. 30-31).

What did Jesus mean when he said, "For the prince of this world is coming"? The prince of this world is the devil (John 12:31; 16:11). Since it says he is coming, Jesus is undoubtedly referring to the activity of the devil in moving Judas to betray him to his enemies, which he was probably doing at that very moment (13:27, 30). In the person of Judas, Satan was literally coming to initiate Christ's arrest and crucifixion. But this did not trouble Jesus, for he had peace even when confronted by Satan's activity.

Satan could do nothing to Christ because "he has no hold on me." This is a hard phrase to render idiomatically in English, but we probably catch the sense of it best if we say that there was no sin in Christ for Satan to latch onto like a handle. He would do his best to destroy Christ. But Jesus would slip through Satan's grasp just as he had earlier slipped through the most hostile crowds. So shall we if we are in Christ. We cannot say, as he did, 'The prince of this world... has no hold on me." He has plenty in us all. But if we are in Christ, then we may stand with him and achieve the victory over the enemy.

Kept in Peace

The Lord has left a great legacy, a legacy of peace. But have we entered into that legacy? In order to do so, we must be those to whom the gift is

bequeathed; we must be Christ's own, his followers. But even if we are, it may still sometimes be true that, just as in terms of a material legacy, one thing or another may keep us from a full enjoyment of it.

In earthly terms physical distance, illness, or incapacity of another kind may keep us from the enjoyment of an inheritance. In spiritual terms other things may do it. Temptation and consequent trials may keep us from peace. We can be so wrapped up in the temptation that we forget the gifts of God. Ignorance will keep peace from us. If we do not know that God is sovereign and that he works all things according to his perfect plan, then our God will be too small for us and we will tremble for him and for ourselves. Sin will also destroy our peace, for we cannot have full fellowship with God when we are willfully sinning. Unbelief will destroy it. All these items will keep our legacy from us. But if, on the other hand, we do what Isaiah refers to in the twenty-sixth chapter of his prophecy, we will know that peace fully. Isaiah speaks in perfect confidence when he says, "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you" (v. 3). What is the necessary ingredient? Trusting in God! The staying of the mind upon him! If we look at the churning waves around us, like Peter we will begin to sink. If we focus on Jesus, we will find ourselves walking even on the stormiest seas.

Chapter 191.
"I Am the True Vine"

John 15:1-5

There have been many guesses about what may have occasioned Christ's parable of the vine and its branches, which extends over the first half of John 15, but it is impossible to be certain of the cause. Since the preceding chapter concludes with the words, "Come now; let us leave," it would seem that the Lord and his disciples left the upper room at this point and began that quiet walk across the city of Jerusalem

down into the Kidron Valley that brought them to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. If that is the case, they may have passed the great golden vine that decorated the door to the Holy Place of the temple or else the vines that grew close to the great walls of the city and stretched along it. This is not certain, however, for the party may have lingered in the upper room even after Christ's statement. Some, who have felt this way for other reasons, have suggested that the vine on the temple may have been visible through a window of the room or that a real vine may have been nearby.

As I say, we do not know the occasion for this parable. We only know that vines were visible everywhere in Judea and that the image of the vine had already been widely used in reference to Israel. "I am the true vine," Jesus said. He then went on to teach about the nature of the church and its fruitfulness, which was to be the result, not of any human achievement, but of its spiritual union with himself. "In me ... in me ... in me!" That is the theme of this parable and of the great "I am" saying with which it is launched.

The True Vine

The first point of this parable is the "I am" saying itself, and the obvious emphasis is upon the word "true." "I am the *true* vine," says Jesus. This does not mean that he is true as opposed to that which is false but, rather, that he is the one, perfect, essential and enduring vine before which all other vines are but shadows. The word is used in precisely this sense elsewhere where Jesus is declared to be the "true light" (1:9), the "true bread" (6:32), and the "true tabernacle" (Heb. 8:2).

But there is an even more immediate reference, which almost certainly would not have escaped the disciples. The vine is the preeminent symbol of Israel. Thus, over and over again in the Old Testament Israel is portrayed as God's choice vine or God's vineyard. Isaiah had written, "I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes,

but it yielded only bad fruit.... The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress" (Isa. 5:1-2, 7). In a similar vein, Jeremiah recorded, "I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?" (Jer. 2:21). Ezekiel 15 compares Israel to a vine also, as does Ezekiel 19, "Your mother was like a vine... : it was fruitful and full of branches" (v. 10). Hosea wrote, "Israel was a spreading vine; he brought forth fruit for himself" (10:1). One of the best-known passages is from the Psalms: "You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches" (Ps. 80:8-10).

The vine was well known, then, as a symbol of Israel. Indeed, a bunch of grapes from the vine is a symbol seen in Israel even today. But the truly extraordinary thing about the use of this image in the Old Testament is that it is always brought forward as a symbol of Israel's degeneration, rather than her fruitfulness. The point of Isaiah's reference is that the vine has run wild, producing sour grapes. "What could have been done more to my vineyard, than I have not done in it?" God asks. Yet it brought forth "wild grapes" (v. 4). Jeremiah terms Israel a "degenerate" and "strange" vine. Hosea calls her "empty," that is, run to leaves. The eightieth psalm is set in the context of a plea for God's renewed favor after the vine has been burned and the hedges broken down.

So here is a vine planted by God to be fruitful but which is not fruitful. And here also, by contrast, is the Lord Jesus Christ who is the true vine. He came from dry ground, but still he grew up before the Lord as "a tender plant" (Isa. 53:2). He was despised of men, but he was perfect and beloved of the Father who, indeed, declared him to be his "beloved Son" in whom he was "well pleased" (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). Jesus is the One who, by his very nature as the true vine, brings forth fruit unto the Father.

The Gardener

There are two things that the Father is said to do in his care of the vine. First, he is said to "cut off every branch that does not bear fruit. Generally this has been understood to be a purging away of dead branches in precisely the same sense that branches are said to be "thrown into the fire" and "burned" in verse 6, but I am convinced that most translators have missed the true meaning of the term "cut off in this instance. Undoubtedly, their translation has been made to conform to what they know or believe is coming in verse 6, but the translation is not the best or even the most general meaning of the Greek word *aim* which lies behind it. The word *airo* has four basic meanings, which are, proceeding from the most fundamental to the most figurative:
(1) to lift up or pick up, (2) to lift up figuratively, as in lifting up one's eyes or voice, (3) to lift up with the added thought of lifting up in order to carry away, and (4) to remove. In translating this word by the verb "cut off the majority of translators have obviously chosen the fourth of these meanings, for the reason suggested above. But the verse makes better sense and the sequence of verbs is better if the first and primary meaning of the word is taken. In that case the sentence would read, "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he lifts up," that is, to keep it from trailing on the ground.

This translation makes better sense of the passage in every way, and in addition it is much better theology. First, the emphasis of this opening section of the parable is, quite rightly, upon the care of the vine by the Father. It would be strange, granting this emphasis, if the first thing mentioned is the carrying away of unproductive branches. But it is not at all strange to emphasize that the gardener first lifts the branches up so that they may be better exposed to the sun and so the fruit will develop properly.

Second, this lifting up is precisely what is first done with vines, as any one who has watched them being cared for knows. Grapes are not like squash or pumpkins that develop quite well while lying on the ground. They must hang free. Consequently, any branch that trails on the ground is unproductive. It would be a strange gardener who immediately cuts

off such a branch without even giving it a chance to develop properly. But it would be wise and customary for him to stretch the vine on an arbor or use some other means of raising it to the air and sun. This is, of course, precisely what vineyards look like, for the vines are always strung from pole to pole on wires.

Third, to translate the word *airo* by "lifts up" gives a proper sequence to the Father's care of the vineyard, indicated by the verb that follows. Thus, he first of all lifts the vines up. Then he cuts off the unproductive elements, carefully cleansing the vine of insects, moss, or parasites that otherwise would hinder the growth of the plant. This last item would have been the ancient equivalent of using insecticides, as is done today.

For these reasons the translation "lifts up" should be preferred. And if this is the case, then the first thing the Father is said to do is to lift the Christian closer to himself. To translate that into spiritual terms, it means that the Father first creates a sense of true devotion in the Christian.

Pruning

The second thing the Father is said to do in his care of the vine is to purge it or prune it. In Greek this word is *katharizo*, which means to cleanse, make clean, or purify. It has given us our English word catharsis. Normally this word would indicate the act of cleansing the vine of anything harmful to it—insects, moss, and so on. But since it is being used of a vine and its branches, it is hard to escape the feeling that pruning is probably also in view. At all events, here the Father is said to be doing a work of removal, removing everything that would prove detrimental to the most fruitful harvest.

In spiritual terms this obviously refers to God's work in removing that which is spiritually detrimental from a given Christian's life. It means to have our bad habits stripped away. It means to have our priorities reordered, our values changed. At times it may mean the removal of friends who are hindering rather than advancing our spiritual growth.

The order of these two activities of the Father are most important, because the reverse only produces hypocrisy. What happens when we go about lopping off so-called unspiritual practices without first being drawn closer to God in true devotion is that we imagine ourselves to be quite saintly, when actually we are not. We begin to look down on others who have not made the same denials. We consider them to be worldly and ourselves spiritual. Moreover, having eliminated these elements ourselves without first having our lives filled with Christ, we discover that we have a vacuum within and that it is easy for something else not at all Christian to fill it. We are like the man in Christ's story who threw one demon out of his house but then suffered greater loss when that demon and seven of his friends returned to repossess him.

What should happen is that we first of all draw near to God and become productive. After that, as the harmful things begin to be cut away, we hardly feel their going. It is a case of maturing, similar to a girl's giving up dolls. No one ever asks a girl to give up playing with dolls. When she is young she plays with them. But as she grows older she becomes interested in a young man, and after this the dolls are just "kid's stuff." The girl does not "give up" dolls. The dolls give her up, because she has grown into a higher sphere of experience. In the same way, as we grow close to the Lord Jesus Christ the dead wood and parasites fall away.

There is one more point connected with the matter of cleansing. It concerns the means by which we are cleansed—the Word of God. Unless we see that the Word must cleanse us, our ideas of purity are man-made and not of God's origin at all. What is more, they are ineffective. David asked the question, "How can a young man keep his way pure?" He answered, "By living according to your word" (Ps. 119:9). Similarly, Jesus says to his disciples, "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you" (John 15:3). Nothing will keep sin from us but a careful attention to and application of God's Word. Nothing else will cleanse us.

Remain in Me

The third point in Christ's parable of the vine and the branches is the secret of fruitfulness, which is abiding in Christ. Here Jesus says, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (vv. 4-5).

The key sentence in these two verses can mean one of three things. It can be a simple declarative, with the sense, "You *must* remain in me, and I *must* remain in you." It can be a promise: "Remain in me, and I *will* remain in you." Or it can be a command meaning," *Remain* in me and, thus, see to it that I for my part also remain in you." Probably, as Leon Morris points out, it is the third of these that should be preferred. "Jesus means that the disciples should live such lives that He will continue to abide in them. The two 'abidings' cannot be separated, and 'abiding' is the necessary prerequisite of fruitfulness. No branch bears fruit in isolation. It must have vital connection with the vine. So to abide in Christ is the necessary prerequisite of fruitfulness for the Christian."

I am not a horticulturist, but I am told by those who know such things that a vine needs to be cultivated at least three years before being allowed to produce fruit at all. That is, it must be trimmed and allowed to grow, then be trimmed and allowed to grow again, and so on for a considerable length of time. Only after this does it become useful for bearing fruit. Similarly, there are times in our lives when we seem to go on for considerable periods, undergoing rather radical treatment at the hands of the Father and seeing little fruit come from it. In such times we doubt if there will ever be fruit. But that is only because we cannot see as God sees. We do not have his perspective. Do not get discouraged if that has happened to you. Instead, remember that Jesus promises fruit in due time if we truly remain in him in a close way. We can give our witness, live the Christian life, and, in a sense, refuse to be concerned about the outcome; for, ultimately, God is the One responsible for the vineyard.

You Can Do Nothing

The last sentence of this section introduces a warning, lest in our budding enthusiasm for bearing fruit for God we forget that it cannot be done without him. "Apart from me you can do nothing," says Jesus.

This statement may be applied in two ways. On the one hand, it may be applied to Christians; and if that is done, we have the following: (1) great work to be done, (2) the possibility of attempting to do it, but without Christ, and (3) the inevitable failure that must result from such effort. Spurgeon, who preached a marvelous sermon on just these words, observed, "Without Jesus you can talk any quantity; but without him you can do nothing. The most eloquent discourse without him will be all a bottle of smoke. You shall lay your plans, and arrange your machinery, and start your schemes; but without the Lord you will do nothing. Immeasurable cloud-land of proposals and not a spot of solid doing large enough for a dove's foot to rest on— such shall be the end of all!" It is good that it is so, for if it were not so, I am afraid that we would try to do it all without him. Nothing is what shall come of our efforts, if it is not Christ working.

On the other hand, there is also encouragement in this verse when we realize that it may be applied to those who are yet Christ's enemies. "Without Christ we can do nothing." That is humbling. But if that is true for those who are united to Christ by faith, in whom he nevertheless dwells, how much truer it is of those who are not at all united to him. They may try to do something against the gospel. They may try to destroy Christ's work. But all their efforts will come to nothing, for only the hand of man (and not that of God) is in them.

Chapter 192.
Remaining and Not Remaining

John 15:6-7

When the Lord Jesus Christ unfolded his parable of the vine and the branches he knew what he was talking about, for he wished to stress that his disciples must be fruitful, and it is a characteristic of the vine that it is good for nothing except fruit-bearing. If it does not produce grapes, it is worthless.

The reason for this is that the wood of the vine is too soft for any other purpose. A tree might be cut down, sawed into planks, and then used to construct furniture or build a house. But the vine is always gnarled and twisted and cannot yield planks. Besides, it is brittle. Anything built of it would soon break in the user's hands and be worthless. It is not even good for burning. William Barclay points out, in his commentary, that at certain times of the year it was stipulated by law that the people were to bring wood offerings to the temple to supply the fires for the sacrifices. But it was also laid down that the wood of the vine must not be brought, because it was useless for that purpose. It burned too quickly. The only thing that could be done with it, save letting it lie around, was to make a bonfire and destroy it quickly.

This, incidentally, is the basis of the fifteenth chapter of Ezekiel, for in that chapter the prophet is emphasizing the uselessness of Israel in her then-quite-unproductive state. He writes, "How is the wood of a vine better than that of a branch on any of the trees in the forest? Is wood ever taken from it to make anything useful? Do they make pegs from it to hang things on? And after it is thrown on the fire as fuel and the fire burns both ends and chars the middle [that is, it is burned up instantly], is it then useful for anything?" (vv. 2-4).

This is the image that Jesus uses of those who are joined to him in saving faith. So the question immediately arises: Are we who are joined to Christ fruitful? Are we useful to him? Or are we merely a lot of leaves and dead wood, fit for nothing but to be gathered up and burned.

Remaining in Christ

The verse we come to first contains the phrase, *"He cuts off."* But the place to begin is not with the negative. It is with the positive idea: with remaining. This is true because remaining in Christ is the major idea of this section of John's Gospel. The word "remain" occurs eight times in just seven verses (vv. 4-10), and the thought is alluded to even more often. It is also true because the negative—"does not remain" is bracketed between two positive statements. Verse 5 reads, "If a man

remains in me," and verse 7 concludes, "If you remain in me..." Besides, we will hardly understand a failure to remain in Christ until we know what remaining means.

In the first place, then, remaining in Christ is for those who are *in Christ already.* That is, Christ's challenge is for those who are already Christians, who have believed on him as the Son of God and Savior and have committed themselves to him as Savior and Lord of their lives. Does this describe you? If so, you can go on to what Jesus is talking about in terms of a full and fruitful life. If not, you must stop at this point or else first come to him. Do not think that Jesus is giving a formula for a full and fruitful life to all men, regardless of their relationship to him. He

is speaking to Christians, and he is giving this promise only to them. So come to him if you have not already done so. Say, "Lord Jesus Christ, I admit that my life is unfruitful and that I can never make it fruitful by myself. I need you. Accept me now, not on the basis of my own merit (for I have none), but on the basis of your death on my behalf. Accept me as one of your followers." If you can pray that prayer and mean it, you can be certain that he has already joined you to himself.

The second point is *the remaining.* It refers to conscious decisions or choices in living the Christian life. Ray Stedman writes of this passage, "When our Lord says: *Abide in me* he is talking about the will, about the choices, the decisions we make. We must decide to do things which expose ourselves to him and keep ourselves in contact with him. This is what it means to abide in him. We have been placed into Christ by the Holy Spirit. Now we must choose to maintain that relationship by the decisions we make—decisions to expose ourselves to his Word in order to learn about him, and to relate to him in prayer wherein we converse with him. Decisions to relate to other believers in Body Life experiences; that is, bearing one another's burdens and confessing our faults and sharing in fellowship with one another, wherein we learn about and see Christ in one another. All of this is designed to relate to him—*Abide in me.* If we do that, we are fulfilling this active, necessary

decision of the will to obey his Word, to do what he says, and to stay in touch with him."

There is also a third point, found in verse 7. There Jesus says, "If you remain in me and *my words remain in you*, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you." This is a point that we have seen earlier in other contexts. It is in chapter 14, for instance. There Christ speaks of love and the expression of love through obedience to his commandments. He says, "If anyone loves me *he will obey my teaching.* My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (v. 23). Or again, even in this present chapter Jesus says, 'You are already clean *because of the word* I have spoken to you" (v. 3).

Some people imagine that they can have the person of Christ without the doctrine of Christ. They like the idea of Jesus, but they shy away from his teaching. Some even revolt against it. But their goal is impossible, for he has declared that he will come to none and make his abode with none except those who keep his commandments. Spurgeon once wrote on this theme, "We cannot separate Christ from the Word; for, in the first place, he is the Word; and, in the next place, how dare we call him Master and Lord and do not the things which he says, and reject the truth which he teaches? We must obey his precepts or he will not accept us as disciples. Especially that precept of love which is the essence of all his words.... If thou wilt not have Christ and his words, neither will he have thee nor thy words."

Not Remaining

In the midst of these encouraging instructions, there is a frightening note, for Jesus speaks of the opposite possibility, the possibility of *not* remaining in him. In this case, he says, "If anyone doe not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned" (v. 6).

Here is a problem, a problem for all Christians (I am convinced) and not just Calvinistic ones. What is the problem? It is the language of the verse. Jesus does not say, notice, that if we fail to abide in him we will

simply be unfruitful, though that is true. Nor does he say we will suffer the loss of all things and yet be saved, as Paul so clearly does in 1 Corinthians 3:15. Rather, he seems to say that if a man does not remain in him, he shall be cut off from the vine and shall wither and be gathered together with others who have also been cut off and shall be burned. The last verb makes one think of being burned in hell. So the text seems to teach the possibility, if not the fact, that some who were once saved will eventually be lost and be consigned to eternal suffering. Does it teach that? If not, how should verse 5 be taken?

Study of the interpretation of this verse shows that there are three basic views taken of it. The first—the one generally assumed by non-Calvinistic theologians and thinkers—is that its meaning is exactly as I have outlined it and that the doctrine of eternal security or perseverance must therefore be rejected as nonbiblical.

But is this valid? To answer that we must see all that is involved. Assuming that this is the meaning of this text (and perhaps of a few other texts), we are then immediately confronted with many other texts, by far the greater weight of biblical revelation, that contradict it. If we hold to this interpretation of John 15:6, we must reject Philippians 1:6, for instance, for how could Paul be confident that he who had begun a good work in the Philippians would continue it until the day of Christ, if they at any time might be cut off for failing to be fruitful? We must reject Romans 8, for in this case there would be something able "to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord." We must even, let us note, reject verses in the Gospel of John itself, for some of the clearest statements of the believer's security are found in this book. One example is John 10:27-29. "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." We must reject all these verses if John 15:6 refutes the believer's security.

Moreover, I do not believe that the Christian can really accept this interpretation, at least after it has been carefully thought through. In

response to John 10:27-29, Arminians usually say that although God will not allow anyone to pluck us out of his hand, he will, nevertheless, not prohibit us, of our own will, from jumping out, if that is truly our desire. But notice that this is not what John 15:6 is saying. John 15:6 is not saying that we can jump out of God's hand, if we choose to do so, but that God will himself thrust us out—more than that, cut us off from a living union with his own Son—not, we must note, because of some grave sin (blasphemy, murder, adultery, or something worse) but simply because we have ceased to be fruitful, and this by the same God who has pledged himself to defend us against all enemies.

I ask: Can any Christian really believe that? I do not believe he can, at least after he has thought it through clearly. If that were the nature of our God, then we would have been cast off long ago; and we would all be in hell. Instead of this, our experience teaches that God has actually born with our fruitlessness, yes, even with our sin and unbelief, and has out of his great love continuously worked to bring us on in the Christian life. Therefore, to adopt this first view is to slander the character of our God and to set the lie to our own experience.

The second interpretation of this verse is that it applies to those who are nominal Christians only. This, for the most part, is the view of Calvinistic writers—Matthew Henry, Charles Spurgeon, the Puritans, and others. These find support in the immediate context: first, in reference to Israel, the old branch, which, according to Paul's teaching in Romans 11 was cut off in order that the wild olive branches (symbolizing the Gentiles) might be grafted in; and then, second, in reference to Judas, who had apparently been cut off that very evening and was soon to be "burned." These interpreters point out that it is not the word "branch" that is used in verse 5, but rather "anyone"—"If *anyone does* not remain in me..."

The difficulty with this approach is that it is hard to believe that it is not true branches, believers in Christ, that are spoken of. For one thing, the argument regarding "man" versus "branch" does not hold up; for neither word is in the Greek of this verse. The Greek word is *tis*, an indefinite pronoun. The meaning, then, is "If anyone [that is, any of the preceding,

the branches or true believers] does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away." Besides, there is nothing in the context to indicate that suddenly a new class of persons, those who have claimed to be Christians but who are not actually regenerate, is being introduced. We may point out that the situation noted by the Calvinistic expositors is a real one—there are those who profess to be Christians but who are not and who will eventually be separated from the true church and be lost—but that is not the point here.

According to the third view, it is the believer's works that are burned, if these works are not of Christ, and it is the Christian's role as a fruit-bearer and not his salvation that is discussed in the passage.

Several observations support this. First, it is fruitfulness rather than salvation that is in view throughout this section of the chapter. True, the matter of burning is often associated with hell and therefore the loss or nonpossession of salvation. But that does not mean that it is always associated with it or that it is associated with it here. On the contrary, burning is not always used of hell, as the passage in 1 Corinthians about works proves. And it is its association with the destruction of useless works rather than with the loss of salvation that is most appropriate in this passage. It is always dangerous to try to interpret a parable on any level other than that involved at its most basic point.

Another observation concerns the actual wording of the verse. It is, for example, "like a branch" that the one who is thrown away is thrown away. Therefore, it is not as a "son" that he is thrown away, but as a fruit-bearer. So far as that is concerned, he may indeed be useless to Christ and the Christian ministry though a Christian. Finally, we note that there is even a change of number between the first part of the sentence and the second. In the first part the important term is singular: "If anyone does not remain...." In the second part the key term is plural: "such *branches are* picked up, thrown into the fire and burned." The "them" and "they" may well be what issues from the "one" who is thrown away in terms of his usefulness. And if this is the case, then it is

the Christian's works rather than the Christian himself that are destroyed.

Lot would be an example here, as Arthur W. Pink points out in his presentation of this evidence. "He was out of fellowship with the Lord, he ceased to bear fruit to His glory, and his dead works were all burned up in Sodom; yet he himself was saved!"

Fruitless Christians?

But shall we rejoice just because we are able to accept the third interpretation and therefore consider ourselves to be safe once again? Shall we relax just because we will not be condemned to hell for our fruitlessness? That would be horrible. Our reaction should be one of horror, rather, to think that it is possible to be saved by Christ, to be cultivated and cared for and coddled by the heavenly husbandman, to be preserved for heaven, and yet not to be fruitful in a proper heart response to the One who has done all this for us. Saved and yet fruitless? Far be it from any Christian to be content with that. It is our shame if we are.

And it is folly too, for if we fail to abide in Christ, we forfeit the two great blessings that are promised to us. The first is fruitfulness. Is it really wise to be fruitless? Does it make sense to be unproductive in the Christian life when we could actually be highly productive to the blessing both of ourselves and those around us? No true Christian can ever agree that this is a wise course of action. The second great blessing is the privilege of answered prayer. It is interesting that Jesus speaks of that explicitly in verse 7, saying, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." These are the two great spheres of blessing for those who abide in Christ—fruitfulness and the privilege of answered prayer. It is toward that divinely appointed sphere of operations that each who belongs to Christ should aspire.

Chapter 193.
God Glorified... in You

John 15:8-11

The connection between John 15:7 and John 15:8 is the connection that the glory of God has with prayer according to the will of God, a connection that we have already seen in John 14:1314 ("And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father."). But here the emphasis is different. In John 14 the emphasis was upon prayer itself. That it was to be answered was to be a comfort to the disciples. In John 15 the emphasis is upon the glory of God. In this text the glorification of God is linked to four elements, each of which should be abundantly visible in the life of each Christian. The elements are: fruitfulness, love, obedience, and joy. Each one is linked to the central theme of the chapter, the need for Christians consciously to remain in Christ, and should receive careful attention.

Fruitfulness

The first of these ideas is fruitfulness, which Jesus highlights by saying, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (v. 8). The flow of thought is that if we are Christ's and remain in him, then we will be fruitful in the Christian life and God will be glorified in our fruitfulness. Moreover, the fact that we are fruitful will be a proof that we are indeed Christ's disciples.

At this point we should probably talk about the real meaning of fruitfulness, for if we fail to do that or if we define fruit wrongly, we are inevitably going to discourage some Christians, which we should not do. Let me explain what I mean. If we begin with a phrase like Paul's words of expectation in writing to the Romans—"that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles" (Rom. 1:13)—and if we therefore identify the fruit of the Christian life with converts to Christ, then we will discourage any who, for whatever reason, do not see many come to the Lord. And we will discourage

those who, because of sickness or old age or whatever unfavorable circumstances, are unable to do much and who are therefore made to feel they are useless.

It is true, of course, that these other items may be looked at as fruit in a certain sense. The Bible does so itself. But the real fruit is that listed in Galatians 5:22-23: 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." This fruit is the fruit of Christ's own character within us. It is his love, joy, peace, and so on, within the Christian. Once we see this, we see that a fruitful life can belong to any child of God regardless of his age or circumstances. He or she need not be disheartened by advancing years or by suffering. In fact, the person may even be encouraged by them, for it is in such circumstances that the character of the Lord can shine brightest and others can best see that he is truly his Lord's disciple.

Do not think that in taking this approach I am denying the need for fruit in the sense of conversions. We obviously need these too. But the starting point, indeed the indispensable heart of the Christian's witness, is this divine character. Apart from it, the effort to save others is like an apple tree trying to produce other apple trees. It cannot be done in that fashion. First, the apple tree must produce apples. After that the apples, which contain apple seeds, will produce other apple trees.

Love

The second of Christ's emphases is love. This follows naturally since love is a fruit of the Spirit. In fact, it is the chief fruit, for "the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). Jesus speaks of it saying, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you" (v. 9).

As I look at that verse I see three parts to it. The first part is a *declaration of love:* "I have loved you." We know that these are wonderful words to hear at any time, if they are true. "I love you." "I have loved you from the moment I first set eyes upon you." "I will always love you." This is the basis of any good marriage, when the love expressed is the fullest measure of love. It is the basis of a Christian

home in the love between parents and children. In a different sense it is the basis of friendship and certainly of fellowship within the church. But if this is true when the words are spoken by mere men and women, how much more wonderful they are when spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ, as here, and when we are the ones loved. This is an astonishing love, for there is nothing in us that could give cause for it. We are sinners. Jesus is holy. We have rebelled against God. Nevertheless, Jesus loves us.

The steps of the expression of his love are these. To begin with, he loved us with an electing love. This is the stage of love revealed in Deuteronomy 7 in relation to Israel: "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you..." (vv. 6-8). He loved you because he loved you. That is the heart and full substance of it. As Spurgeon has written, "Election is based upon affection, and that affection is its own fountain."

Next, the Lord became a man like us, so great was his love for us. It is written of love in marriage, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Thus did the eternal Son. He left his Father's home in heaven to come to earth to woo and wed his bride, the church. He redeemed her. The incarnation is Jesus becoming like us so that we might become like him.

Finally, having elected us in love and become like us in a human form, Jesus died for us. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). That is true, and the greatest example of it is the death of Jesus himself. Said Spurgeon, "That laying down of life in our Lord's case was specially a proof of love, for he died voluntarily; there was no necessity upon him, as upon us, to die. Other men, if they died for us, would but pay the debt of nature a little before its time; but Jesus died who needed not to die, so

far as he himself was concerned. He died also amid circumstances of pain, and shame, and desertion, which made that death peculiarly bitter. The death of the cross is to us the highest proof of our Savior's infinite love of us. He must die the death of a felon, between two thieves, utterly friendless, the object of general ridicule; and this he must do as bearing our sins in his own body. All this makes us say, 'Behold how he loved us!' O beloved! can we doubt Christ's love, since he laid down his life...?"

It is not only a sublime declaration of love that we have in this verse. We also have *the measure of that love;* for Jesus says, *"As the Father has loved me,* so have I loved you." I suppose that we would rejoice in the love of Christ for us even if his love were but a part-time or half-hearted thing. For him to love us at all would be remarkable. But this is not what he says; nor is it the case. Jesus says that he has loved us, not with an imperfect or even a "perfect" human love, but rather with the greatest love there is; namely, the love which has existed within the being of the Godhead from all eternity and which will exist to all eternity, the love of the Father for him and (we must obviously add) his love for the Father. Is there a greater love than that? It is impossible that there could be. This love is without beginning or end. It is without measure. It is without change. It is according to the measure of this great love, and consequently with that love itself, that Christ loves us.

One thing more. First, we saw Jesus' declaration of his love for us. Second, we saw the measure of that love. Third, we have *the challenge of love,* which is, in this case, to "continue" it. If we continue in his love, then we will be remaining in him and prove fruitful.

Obedience

The third word in this catalog of elements contributing to God's glory is obedience, though it is expressed in a challenge to keep Christ's commands, as has been done elsewhere. "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love" (v. 10).

Are we tired of this emphasis by now, this emphasis upon Christ's commands? I suspect that we are; but if we are, the fault is in us and not the commands. For, as John says in his first epistle, "His commands are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30). Then what is wrong? I suspect that what is wrong with us is that we are not really as anxious to do Christ's commands as we would like to think we are; thus, the emphasis upon obedience (we have had it several times already in the last discourses, and we will have it several times more) exposes our halfhearted commitment to the will of Christ and so gives birth to feelings of true guilt.

What happens to us is precisely what happened to Peter when, following the resurrection, the Lord was recommissioning him to service. Peter had denied the Lord three times in the presence of the servants and soldiers in the courtyard of the high priest. So Christ recommissioned him with a threefold pattern. He asked him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

Peter was aware of his recent failure, but he did love Jesus. So he replied in what I believe to be an air of genuine humility, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

After a short time Jesus asked Peter again, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter replied that he did.

Again Christ gave the commission, "Feed my sheep."

Finally the Lord asked Peter the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" This time we are told, "Peter was grieved because he asked him a third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.'" Jesus said, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17).

Why was Peter grieved? He was grieved because the third repetition reminded him of his threefold denial and hence awakened grief and true

guilt for what he had done. Moreover, the questioning had suggested that perhaps, just perhaps, Peter's first effusive answer, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you," could not be taken at quite its face value. Peter was always prone to blurt something out, but did he really mean it? Did he mean it enough to take a servant's role in caring for Christ's sheep? Did he mean it enough to continue to fulfill this or any other command of Christ until his life's end? Ah, that was quite a different matter. And Peter, like us, did not enjoy being reminded of his weakness.

We need to be reminded anyway. That is the point of the repetition. "If you love me, obey my commands" (14:15). "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me" (14:21). "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teachings" (14:23). "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love" (15:10). "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (15:14). The point is obvious. We must keep Christ's commands if we are to be Christ's disciples and grow in his love.

Let us note one thing further. It is true that we are reminded to obey all that Jesus has given us by way of instruction. But even as he tells us this, Jesus points out that he is asking of us no more than he has already asked and given of himself. 'Just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love" is his comparison. We can be encouraged by this, knowing that the One who instructs us has himself set the pattern and will give us strength to do as he requires.

Joy

In the last verse, Jesus introduces the fourth and final element that is to be in us and by which the Father shall be glorified. It is joy. Christ adds it, I am sure, to indicate that his commands actually lead in precisely the opposite direction from being grievous. They lead to the fullness of that joy that is of God and that is rightly listed as the second virtue in the list of the Spirit's fruit in Galatians. Jesus says of this virtue, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (v. 11).

This sentence speaks of the Christian's joy in three senses: joy attained, joy abiding, and joy abounding. Joy is to be *attained* as a result of the things Jesus had been teaching. This is the reason why the Christian must abide in him, so that the views, outlook, and aspirations of the Master will be those of the disciples as well. This is the reason for the twofold repetition of the word "joy"—"my joy" and "your joy." The joy of Jesus is to be the joy of the disciple. His joy was a wonderful thing, for it was not deterred by suffering or any other circumstance. In fact, it rejoiced in hardship; for we read that Jesus "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2). Where did he find that joy? The answer is in his intense desire to do the will of his Father: "I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices" (Ps. 16:8-9).

Second, the verse speaks of joy *abiding*—that "my joy may *be* [remain] in you." The point of this phrase is that joy does not necessarily remain. Many things can destroy it. Sin can destroy it. So can disobedience or unbelief. David confessed this in the great fifty-first psalm, crying out to God, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation" (v. 12). It was not that his salvation was lost, only that the joy had evaporated. This always happens when we become separated from Christ in the sense of having the fellowship that once was ours broken. In contrast to this, we must abide in him; for when we abide in him the joy abides also.

Finally, the verse speaks of *abounding* joy. This is the meaning of the clause "and that your joy might be complete." I wish that all Christians were more joyful, and, as I read this verse, I sense that the Lord desires this too. Unfortunately, there are many long faces and dour looks. There is too much defeat, too much unhappiness. It does not need to be that way. Rather we should be able to rejoice in Christ, even in the face of arrest, beatings, crucifixion, and death, as he did.

When joy, linked to fruitfulness, love, and obedience, is found in the life of a Christian, all can see it and know that the source is divine. We can never produce these things. We cannot produce the Spirit's fruit. We

cannot produce love. We cannot produce joy. But Jesus can do it as we abide in him.

Chapter 194.
No Greater Love

John 15:12-14

There is something charming about the word "friend" or "friendship." It is due partly to our desire for a close friend or friends and partly, too, to our remembrance of them. We look to our past and can almost mark the major periods of our lives by friends we have had. We think of the friends who went to grade school with us and of the things we did with them. Perhaps at the point of going into high school we made different friends, and we think sometimes, not only of the friends, but of the adventures we had—sometimes adventures that the teachers or other authorities did not entirely appreciate. We have had college friends and those we have acquired later in life. We value friendship and know that we would be much impoverished if we had no friends at all.

It is this awareness that probably gives the verses to which we now come their special appeal, for in them the Lord Jesus Christ, the great incarnate God of the universe, speaks of friendship in terms of our relationships to him. He calls us friends, saying, "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you."

Human Friendship

When Jesus says, "You are my friends," it is evident that he is speaking to us on the human level in terms we can clearly understand. And he is doing so—we cannot fail to see it—so that we might contrast his friendship, which is great and perfect, to even the best of the other friendships we have known.

The best known of the biblical examples is the friendship between Jonathan, the son of King Saul, and David, the young hero of Israel. Jonathan was in line for the throne. But David was so evidently blessed of God that the people were saying that he should be the next king. Here was cause for great antagonism, antagonism between the apparent rights of the one and the supposed aspirations of the other. But there was no antagonism. Instead there was a great and beautiful friendship. It was a case in which each sacrificed in order to put the other's interests ahead of his own.

Sometimes the love that exists between one friend and another leads to the ultimate sacrifice, to death. A friend of mine tells that as he was growing up he knew a man who in a sublime moment of self-sacrifice gave his life to try to save his grandson. The two were out in a boat on the Monongahela River in West Virgina, and neither of them could swim. The child, for one reason or another, fell overboard and was drowning. So the man jumped in after the child. Both drowned. But afterward when they found the bodies, the grandfather still had the young child clutched in his arms. He had been so anxious to save his grandson that he had not even opened up his arms to attempt to swim to save himself.

When we hear a story like that we tend to become silent, for we know that we stand before something sublime. It is the ultimate sacrifice, the sacrifice of one's life. Because of such sacrifices we understand what the Lord is saying when he declares in clear reference to his own self-sacrifice: "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

Friend of Sinners

On the other hand, it is not really fair to talk about Jesus' sacrifice in merely human terms, for his death surpasses anything we can imagine. It may not happen often, but sometimes one human being will voluntarily die for another; still, this gift never equals or even parallels Jesus' sacrifice. We see this when we reflect on Jesus' death.

First, when we begin to reflect on Jesus' death we recognize that his death was exceptional if only because *Jesus did not have to die.* That is not true of us. We are mortal. We must die. But Jesus was immortal and therefore did not have to die. Indeed, he was life itself; for he said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). He could have come into this world, performed a full and varied ministry, and then have returned to heaven without ever having experienced death. On the other hand, of us it is said, "Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27). What does this mean in terms of self-sacrifice? Merely this. If you or I were to give our lives for someone else, while that would undoubtedly be a great and heroic sacrifice, it would nevertheless at best be merely an anticipation of what must eventually come anyway. We would simply be dying a bit sooner than normally. The Lord did not need to die under any circumstances.

Second, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ is exceptional in that *he knew he would die.* Again, this is not usually the case when a mere man or woman gives his or her life for another. Few who die in this way do so knowing in advance that they will die. Rather, it is usually the case that although the act is a risk and death is possible, they nevertheless think they may escape death while yet saving their friend. People take calculated risks and sometimes die, but they do not often die deliberately. Jesus by his own testimony deliberately went to the cross to die for our salvation.

There is another area in which the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for his friends shines brighter than any love of which we are capable. The text says that we are Christ's friends and that he was going to give his life for his friends. But if we think of this closely and honestly, we must recognize that, when the Lord Jesus gave his life for us, strictly speaking *we were not exactly his friends.* True, he calls us friends. It is also true that we become his friends. But we become friends because of his act, because of his electing grace toward us manifesting itself in the atonement and in the ministry of his Spirit by which our natural rebellion against God is overcome and our hearts are drawn to love and serve Jesus. When he died for us, or (if we may push that even farther

back) when in eternity past he determined to die for us, he did so while we were yet enemies or were forseen to be enemies. It was "while we were still sinners, [that] Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

Here especially do we see the wonderful love of the Lord Jesus Christ. So long as we think of ourselves as being somewhat good in God's sight we do not see it. But when we see ourselves as God sees us, then the surpassing worth of the love of Christ becomes evident.

It is this that leads up to the verse I have just quoted from Paul's treatment of the human condition in Romans. The opening chapter of that book deals with man's sin, showing how all men and women have possessed a certain knowledge of God but have turned from that knowledge in order to worship a god of their own devising. Paul says that a certain knowledge of the existence and power of God is disclosed in nature and in the consciences of all men and women. But we have rejected that knowledge. Paul says, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles" (Rom. 1:21-23).

There are certain consequences of this, as the chapter goes on to show. We have given up God. So, says Paul, in a certain sense God has given us up. He has given us up to certain consequences. Three times in this chapter we read that "God gave them over." In every case, however, we are told what God gave them over to. This is important, for it is not as if God were holding the human race in his hand and then let go with the result that the human race simply drifted off into nowhere. If I let go of an object, the object falls. I have not given it up to nothing.

I have given it up to the law of gravity, and the law of gravity draws it downward. In the same way, God gives us over to the sad consequences of our rebellion.

First of all, God has given us over to "sexual impurity" (v. 24). That is, when we turn our backs upon God, who is perfect in his purity, we

inevitably become dirty spiritually.

Second, God has given us over to "shameful lusts" (v. 26). That is, the good affections we have and that we rightly cherish become warped because they are severed from their source. Love becomes lust. A proper sense of responsibility becomes the driving pride of personal ambition. Self-sacrifice becomes selfishness, and so on.

Third, God says that he has given us over to a "depraved mind" (v. 28). This means that we have developed a way of thinking that is antagonistic toward God so that we are constantly devising philosophies and actions that try to eliminate his presence from our lives.

These important verses from Romans give God's assessment of the human race. He made us. More than this, he made us in his own image. But we have rebelled against him and defaced that image. Instead of God's glory, we have advanced man's depravity. Instead of his sovereignty, we have sought human autonomy. Instead of holiness, we have sin. Instead of love, hate. Yet, in spite of our depravity, Christ came to be our friend and prove his friendship by dying for us. As Paul states, "At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6-8).

Spiritual Death

There is one more reason why the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for his friends, seen in his death for us, is superior to all human loves. *The death of the Lord was a spiritual death,* whereas ours, if we are Christians, is only physical.

If we were to give our life for someone else, the death we would endure would be only physical. We cannot die spiritually in the place of another person. But that is precisely what Jesus Christ did. Death is separation. Physical death is the separation of the soul and spirit from the body. Spiritual death is the separation of the soul and spirit from

God. This is what makes hell such a terrible place; those in hell are separated from God. And because God is the source of all good— all joy, peace, love, and other blessings—hell is the opposite. It is misery, unrest, hate, and so on. This is the separation that Jesus endured for us. He died physically also; that is true. His death was particularly painful and degrading. But the truly horrible aspect of his death was his separation from the Father when he was made sin for us and bore sin's punishment.

This is the meaning of the cry wrung from his lips in that moment: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" I do not know how to explain that. I do not know how it is possible for the second person of the Godhead to be separated from the first person of the Godhead, even for a brief time, as this was. But this is what happened as Jesus experienced ultimate spiritual death in order that we might never have to experience it. Love like that goes beyond our best understanding.

These truths and more are involved in Christ's statement: "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." We read that and acknowledge its truth. But then we go on to say, "Yes, and greater love has no one at all—either man, devil, or angel—than that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, should die a spiritual death for us sinners."

Do you know him as the One who demonstrated his love and friendship for you by thus dying? Is he your friend in that sense? If not, you are not yet truly a Christian. But you can be. You can find him to be your friend, indeed, a superlative friend. As the hymn says:

> There's not a friend like the
> lowly Jesus, No not one!
> No not one!

You need only come to him, confessing your sin and acknowledging your need of him to be your Savior.

Friends of Jesus

There is one other question that arises from our text. I have asked, "Is Jesus your friend?" This is the question that emerges from verse 13 in which Jesus speaks of his love and, therefore, of his friendship for us. But in the next verse we have what might be called the other side of that question. It is, "Are you Christ's friend?" Jesus suggests this when he declares, "you are my friends if you do what I command you" (v. 14).

I am glad the Lord put it as he did, for I suppose that if we had come to him and had asked, "Lord, you have shown yourself to be a friend to us; what must we do to be your friends?" Jesus could have answered, "You have my example of what a true friend is; do that." But if he had said that, we would have been discouraged. How could you or I do that—love as he loves, give ourselves as he gave himself? It is impossible for us to die spiritually for someone else. If Jesus had required us to do all he did, it would be impossible to become his friend. But he did not say that. Instead, he put the requirements in our terms and on our level, saying, "You can be my friends if you will only do what I command you." This means that we are to show our friendship to him by simple obedience.

Did I say "simple"? Yes, it is simple; but it is simple *obedience*, and this means that it must be active, continuous, and in all things. We see that our obedience must be *active,* for Jesus said, "You are my friends if ye *do*...." Unfortunately some Christians talk about the Christian life as though it consisted largely in refusing to do certain things. If we fall into that way of thinking, we imagine after we have refused to drink alcohol, refused to play cards, refused to have extramarital sex, refused to cheat in business, and so on, that we have done a great deal. But we have not. We have obeyed negatively but not positively. Christ calls upon us to love one another, and that cannot be done except in very practical ways. We are also to pray. We are to worship with other Christians. Our lives are to be marked by good deeds. It would make a great difference in the lives of many Christians if, as they read their Bibles and pray each day, they would pause as part of their devotions to ask what practical things the Lord would have them do.

Second, our obedience should also be *continuous.* Jesus did not say, "If you do what I command and then quit" or "If you do it on Sundays" or "If you do it when you feel like it." The verb is a present subjunctive meaning "If you are doing." The idea is of continuous action, day after day, year after year. There is no vacation from being a disciple of the Lord.

Finally, our obedience is to be *in all things,* for he says, "If you do *whatever* I command you." It means coming to him in love to do whatever he asks of us, not picking and choosing as some do, not exalting those aspects of the Christian faith we like and neglecting those we dislike. Rather it means coming with that yielded humility of mind and body that places us prostrate at his feet and asks from that position, "Lord, what will you have me do?" It is only when we ask that question and mean it that we find ourselves being lifted up to do the great errands of our king, and not as slave either, but rather as a friend of Jesus.

I asked earlier, "Is Jesus your friend?" Now I must ask, "Are you Christ's friend by this definition?" God grant that you might be, to your own great joy and to the praise of his glory.

Chapter 195.
Fruit, More Fruit

John 15:15-17

A part from the fifteenth chapter of John's Gospel, in which the Lord Jesus Christ calls his disciples friends, I do not know of any other characters in the Bible who are called friends of God except Abraham. But this one case is significant, because the nature of the relationship of God to Abraham is an illustration of the main point of Christ's teaching here. Abraham is called "the friend of God" in James 2:23, and the reference in James is either to 2 Chronicles 20:7 (in which Abraham is called "your friend," "your" being God) or Isaiah 41:8 (in which

Abraham is called "my friend") or both. The significance of the term is in the fact that God spoke freely to Abraham and thus repeatedly opened his mind to him. The classic example is God's conversation with Abraham just before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In this conversation God said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" (Gen. 18:17). The answer was no, for the story goes on to record how God revealed the coming destruction to Abraham and how Abraham, knowing that Lot was in Sodom, interceded for the righteous who lived in those cities.

Communication is essential to friendship. Friends speak to one another. They bare their souls and tell their troubles. They share their aspirations. It is no surprise then that in the upper room, in the midst of those conversations in which Jesus calls his disciples friends, the Lord of glory shares his thoughts with them. Already he has done this in reference to his death and resurrection, heaven, the coming of the Holy Spirit after his ascension, and other doctrines. Now he does so in reference to his special calling of them to fruitful service.

He declares that they are his friends because "everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you" (v. 15).

Friends, Not Servants

One thing that characterizes our friendships is autonomy in the area of choosing whom we will befriend and whom we will not befriend. Generally speaking, that exercise of autonomy is mutual for the persons involved. For example, when we meet another, three reactions are possible so far as friendship is concerned. First, we may not like him or her, and he or she may not like us. In that case we try to be polite to the other person, but no friendship develops. Second, we may like the other person, but he or she may not like us, or vice versa. In that case also no friendship develops unless, of course, the one who dislikes the other changes his or her mind. Third, there may be a mutual attraction. It is only in this latter situation that the people involved become friends. This means that we have a choice in the matter, and so does the other person. We consider this essential to friendship. Yet, in striking contrast

to our understanding of the matter, in these verses Jesus stresses that we have become his friends, not because we chose him (because we did not), but because he in his great mercy chose us.

Do we think that we have chosen him? If we do, we have not sufficiently recognized the depth of our own depravity or the unmerited nature of God's grace. The true situation is that we had not only failed to be his friends; we had actually become his enemies, having rejected his rightful rule over us and having spurned his love. The friendship is established only when God acts in Christ to remove the barrier. It is only after he has spoken of laying down his life for us that the Lord Jesus speaks of his disciples as friends.

There is a second difference. It is seen in the purpose clause of verse 16 ("I chose you and appointed you to *go* and bear fruit") and in the command that follows ("This is *my command:* Love each other"). Does it not seem strange from our conception of friendship that Jesus should speak of choosing his friends in order that they might do something and, which is perhaps even worse, immediately follow his declaration of friendship with a command? We would not think of choosing a friend for what he or she could do. That sounds calculating and ignoble. It is not worthy of friendship. Moreover, we would not think of commanding our friend to do something, at least not if we wished to retain him as our friend.

How can Jesus do this? Is his friendship less than human friendships? Or is he teasing, that is, pretending to be our friend when actually he is not? The answer is in the nature of the friendship involved. For this, while true friendship, is nevertheless not a friendship between two equals but between sinful and limited human beings and God. Consequently, the full dimensions of that relationship (which always involve our sin, ignorance, and finitude as well as God's holiness, omniscience, and total sovereignty) are involved. We are God's friends —by grace. But that does not mean that we can approach God as his equal or dictate the terms of the friendship. It means that we must

approach him in gratitude always bearing in mind that the friendship exists because he has stooped to our estate.

Fruitful Christians

Having placed the matter of friendship in its proper perspective the Lord goes on to disclose the privileges of that friendship in terms of a life of fruitful Christian service. Here, therefore, the purpose clause emerges, not as a qualification upon the nature of the friendship (though in one sense it is that) but rather as the glorious privilege and destiny of all whom the Lord Jesus Christ calls friends. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit— fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name" (v. 16). This statement of purpose has two parts, each of which is introduced by the important Greek word *hina* ("in order that"): first, that they might be fruitful and, second, that their prayers might be answered.

This is not the first time the word "fruit" has occurred in this chapter, but it carries the understanding of fruitfulness a step farther than any of the previous occurrences. In these verses there is a fourfold progression.

1. In the first part of verse 2 the Lord speaks merely of "fruit." There are no qualifying adjectives. His teaching is that it is the purpose of the vine's branches to bear *fruit* and that he is concerned that they do so. In studying this verse and (in chapter 14) the fruit of the Spirit, we saw that the fruit is primarily those aspects of character that it is the Spirit's work to produce in the life of believers. The fifth chapter of Galatians describes it as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (vv. 22-23). In a secondary sense, the word "fruit" may also refer to good works, which flow from these characteristics, and to converts to Christianity.

2. In the second half of verse 2 the Lord adds a modifier to the word "fruit," saying, "Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will bear even *more fruit.*" "More" is a searching word, as Andrew Murray has noted in his valuable devotional study *The True Vine.* The reason it is searching is that "as churches and

individuals we are in danger of nothing so much as selfcontentment. The secret spirit of Laodicea—we are rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing—may prevail where it is not suspected. The divine warning—poor and wretched and miserable—finds little response just where it is most needed." So let us not be content with little fruit. Regardless of past blessings, there is always more that God has for us in growth of Christian character, service, evangelism, and other blessings.

3. Seven verses farther, in verse 8, we have another modifier. This time the Lord says, 'This is to my Father's glory, that you bear *much fruit*, showing yourselves to be my disciples." Christians often seem to want little to happen—perhaps because they consider "much" of anything to be worldly, including spiritual growth and successes. But whatever the reason, it is certain that Christ is thinking in different terms here, for here he speaks of "much fruit" and of the fact that "much fruit," rather than merely "fruit" or "more fruit," is to the glory of God. Do we believe him? Then we must strive to achieve much, knowing that little fruit brings but little glory either to the Father or the Son.

4. Finally, in the verse we are studying, we come to the last stage in this progression. It is "fruit that will last" (v. 16). Not all fruit does last. In fact, in purely agricultural terms no fruit really lasts. Pears perish. Apples become rotten. Berries, oranges, and grapefruit spoil. In human terms much that we do also belongs in this category. We work, but much of our work and the fruits of that work pass away. In time we will ourselves pass away. Does nothing remain? Does all pass? One thing remains, and that is the fruit produced in the life of the Christian by the Lord Jesus Christ. He is eternal. Therefore, his work is also eternal and will never perish. We come close to this in a bit of doggerel that says:

Only one life! 'T' will soon be past.
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Is Christ at work in you? Or is it just you working? Here every Christian worker should pause and ask what he or she is accomplishing in the light of eternity. We should remember that it is possible to build great monuments out of wood, hay, and stubble. A haystack can be quite a large thing. But these will not last. Rather, we are to build with the gold, silver, and precious stones provided by God and assembled by the Lord Jesus Christ according to his blueprint.

Intercession

The second purpose of Christ's calling of us to be friends is that "the Father will give you whatever you shall ask in my name." I must admit that when I first looked at that clause, I found myself wondering why it is introduced here in what is apparently a repetitive way. The inducement to pray is not new. We have had it several times already (14:13-14; 15:7).

It would be a sufficient answer to say that the promise is repeated simply because we need to hear it and because we are so lax in our life of prayer. But as I think about the context in which Jesus speaks of this new friendship and of his command that we love one another, it seems to me that he is probably thinking here of that particular type of prayer known as intercession.

Intercession is prayer for others. What should be more natural for the one who along with others has been brought into this great brotherhood and sisterhood of Christianity than that he or she should pray earnestly for those others who are also Christ's friends? If they are Christ's friends, then they are our friends too. And we must pray for them, as indeed they also must pray for us. In this respect we must be like a towering vine, anchored upon earth but reaching up to that rarified and invigorating atmosphere of heaven in which we meet the Lord and have our requests met by him.

Love One Another

The last verse of this section returns to the theme with which verses 12-17 began, to "love one another." It is not the first time that this command has been given, and if we are sensitive at this point, it is possible that we are just a bit irritated at Christ's repetition. In John

13:34-35, Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." In the next chapter Christ speaks frequently of our need to love him. Then, in chapter 15, we read, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (v. 12). Why this constant repetition?
And why are we irritated? The answer to both questions is the same: we do not love one another. Therefore, we feel guilty about it and know that we need to be reminded.

John himself learned this, for, in imitation of Jesus, he repeats the command in his first letter to the churches of Asia. "Love one another," he says in 4:7. "Love one another," he repeats just four verses later (v. 11). Then a third time, "Love one another" (v. 12). We are to love one another because of God's great love toward us and because of Christ's command.

Do we? Do we love one another within that bond of friendship created by the Lord Jesus Christ and according to his own love and standards? Let me list some things that love within friendship does.

1. *Love prays for the other.* Job is a significant example. Job had lost all that he valued, including his family, health, and property. In his misery his "friends" had turned against him though pretending to give comfort. Truly, if anyone ever had a right to spurn friendship, it was Job. Yet at the end of the story, after God had intervened to disclose his true purposes and reveal his anger at the counsel of Job's friends, we read that Job prayed and that God blessed Job greatly. For whom did Job pray? "After Job had prayed *for his friends,* the Lord made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10).

2. *Love sticks close to the friend when the friend is in trouble.* Solomon knew what it is to have a friend who sticks close, for he wrote: "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24). He

indicates the same thing a chapter earlier saying, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov. 17:17).

3. Finally, *love also gives and gets.* This double activity is seen in Christ's parable of the two friends, one of whom visited the other in the night to say, "Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him" (Luke 11:5-6). In the context of Christ's parable the friend who is in bed is reluctant to get up to give to the one asking, yet eventually does, the point being the superior worth of the friendship of God, who gives to all men liberally and is not hard to be entreated. The parable ends, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (v. 9). I tell the story, however, not to stress the willingness of God to give (though that is a valuable lesson) but rather to show the nature of that friendship that goes out of its way to supply what another needs.

We would not want to imply that we should spend time in prayer meetings when it is within our power to give to those who are in need. That is like dedicating a gift to God (*corban*) when parents are destitute. On the other hand, if we are thinking spiritually, we know that we have nothing to give of ourselves. We cannot meet the other's spiritual need. Yet, by God's grace, we have a friend who can meet those needs, even the Lord Jesus. "Friend,... a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him." Can we think that if we pray that way, recognizing our own need, Jesus will not provide all that the friend of ours (who is, therefore, also a friend of his) lacks? Of course not. Therefore, we must love and give and pray. And we must be friends of Christ, as well as of one another.

Chapter 196.
Hated for No Cause

John 15:18-25

The complaint is sometimes made against some American evangelists that, while they may faithfully proclaim the advantages of Christianity, they nevertheless do not adequately confess the disadvantages from the human point of view. In particular, they do not stress the cost of discipleship nor that the one who faithfully follows Christ will be persecuted. I cannot say how true this criticism is. It is probably less true today than it was a few years ago. But whatever the case, the failure does not stem from Jesus. He was totally honest about discipleship. True, he taught the many and great advantages of following him—eternal life, access to the Father through prayer, the gift of the Holy Spirit, a home prepared by him in heaven. But at the same time he never glossed over the fact that love for him would mean the world's hatred.

We have a prominent example of this in the verses that form the second half of John 15. Up to this point Jesus has stressed the blessings that naturally come to one who has left all to follow him. He has been doing this in order to comfort the disciples, for they were rightly distressed at thoughts of their Lord's pending departure. But now the emphasis changes, and instead of privileges Christ speaks of persecution. The dominant theme is the hostility of the world to Christ and his followers, the word "hate" or "hatred" being repeated seven times. Earlier he had spoken of "his own," now of "the world." Before, it was "friends," now "enemies." First he declared his "love" for them and exhorted them to love; in these verses he warns of the world's
"hatred."

These verses are of great importance, if for no other reason than that we might learn of the great gap between those who are Christ's own and the world. If we understand it, we will not raise so many questions as to whether there is harm in this or that. We will not ask how worldly we can be. Rather, we will seek the will of God in all things and strive for God's glory.

The World's Hatred

Christ begins by talking about the hatred of the world for the disciples. But the thrust of the verses is not only to say that they will be hated; it is also to show why. There are three reasons.

First, the disciples of Christ will be hated because they are not "of the world" (v. 19). When John uses the term "world" (as he does five times in just this one verse), he is using it not of the world globe, the earth, or even of the human race that populates the earth. Rather, he is using it of the world system. It is the world of men in rebellion against God, and consequently, it is inclusive of the world's values, pleasures, pastimes, and aspirations. It is said of the world in this sense that it does not know God (1 John 3:1) and that it rejected Jesus (John 1:10). This is the world that hates Christ's followers, and the reason it hates them is that they are not of it. The world hates them for the difference.

In Barclay's commentary on John there are several illustrations of this principle, all from purely secular sources. The first concerns the man who invented the umbrella. Today umbrellas may be seen everywhere and are not at all unusual. But when Jonas Hanway first tried to introduce the umbrella into England and walked down the street beneath one he was pelted with dirt and stones. He was actually persecuted. Again, there is Aristides of Athens. Aristides lived during Athens' golden era and was an outstanding man. He was called Aristides the Just. Yet he was banished from Athens. Why? When one of the citizens was asked why he had voted for Aristides' banishment, he answered, "Because I am tired of hearing him always called the Just." A third illustration is Socrates. Socrates was known as the human gadfly because he was always calling upon others to examine themselves and think deeply, but for this they hated and killed him. Barclay concludes, "To put it at its widest—the world always suspects nonconformity. The world likes a pattern; it likes to be able to label a person and to classify him and to put him in a pigeon-hole. And anyone who does not conform to the pattern will certainly meet trouble."

If this is true of any difference at all, as it seems to be, how much more true is it of that radical difference caused by the transformation of some individuals by the Spirit and power of Jesus Christ. Here is a difference that makes the unusual qualities of Hanway, Aristides, or Socrates pale by comparison. Christians have been with Jesus and have become like him in part. They are not like the world—at least they had best not be. They have other experiences, loyalties, and goals. So the world hates them.

There is a second reason Jesus gives for the world's hatred of his disciples, and this is that he has "chosen" them out of the world. He says, 'You do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you" (v. 19). What is the meaning of this? It is merely the old subject of election. Christ elected the disciples to salvation. He chose them for a specific work in this world. Therefore, although the world rejects Christ's salvation and despises his work, it also hates those who have been chosen by him for it.

There is probably nothing that the world hates more than the doctrine of election. Certainly it was this more than anything else that caused the world's virulent hatred of Christ during the days of his ministry. In John 6, after Jesus had begun to talk about election, pointing out that no man is able to come to him unless drawn by the Father and that those who do not come to him do not because they cannot, we read that many of his disciples "turned back and no longer followed him" (v. 66). Similarly, in John 8, after he had taught the same thing, we read, "Then took they up stones to throw at him" (v. 59). Nothing so stirs up the hatred of the worldly mind than the teaching that God in sovereign grace elects some and does not elect others.

Third, because it hates Christ, the world hates Christians because of their identification with Christ. This truth is probably present in verse 19 of our text also, as we see when we read the verse with an emphasis upon the word "I." "*I* have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." This emphasis is justified because of the drift of the verses that follow. There Christ says, "If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they have obeyed my teaching, they will

obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name" (vv. 2021).

Here is the crux of the matter. Why does the world hate Christians? It hates them because it hates their Master. Hatred does not exist because of what Christians are in themselves; they are nothing. It does not exist because of what they have done; they are harmless (or at least they should be). Hatred exists because the world hates Jesus and because Christians are identified with him by virtue of his call.

Christ Hated

But in a sense, this only pushes the problem back one step, for having explained the first hatred by the hatred of Jesus, we immediately ask: But why does the world hate Jesus? It is a perfectly valid question. Jesus answers it in verses 22-24.

The first reason is that the world hates Jesus because of his words. Jesus states this by saying, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well" (vv. 22-23). Why should they hate Jesus for his words? There are people whom we might hate for their words. Some men's words are arrogant, and people are opposed to them for their arrogance. We all hate pride and show it no pity, save in ourselves. But Jesus was not arrogant. Rather, he was entirely humble, the most perfectly humble man who ever lived, who even when he was afflicted "did not open his mouth" (Isa. 53:7). Some men's words are selfish. Everything revolves around themselves, and they are rightly despised for that. But Jesus was not selfish. He actually gave up his divine prerogatives in order that he might become like us and die for our salvation. Some person's words are mean. But can we hate Christ for that? He was not mean. Instead, he was loving and gentle. He said, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). In still other cases the words men speak are hypocritical, and they are hated for that. But the Lord was not hypocritical. Instead, he is the only man who ever lived whose word

could always be trusted, who never said one thing while meaning another.

Then what does Christ mean when he says that his words are one cause of men's hatred? How can this be if they were not arrogant, selfish, mean, or hypocritical? That is just the problem. Before Christ came and spoke, men and women could get by with relative goodness. They could have a little arrogance, but not too much; a little selfishness, but not too much; a little meanness, a little hypocrisy. Moreover, they could be thought good because of the limitation. After Christ came this was revealed for what it is: sin. People hated the exposure.

Ironside tells a story to illustrate this point. Years ago, at the time of the opening up of inland Africa by missionaries, the wife of an African chief happened to visit a mission station. The missionary had a little mirror hung up on a tree outside his home, and the woman happened to glance into it. She had come straight out of her pagan environment and had never seen the hideous paintings on her face, or her hardened features. Now, gazing at her own face, she was startled. She asked the missionary, "Who is that horrible-looking person inside the tree?"

"It is not the tree," said the missionary. 'The glass is reflecting your own face."

She could not believe it until she was holding the mirror in her hand. When she had understood she said to the missionary, "I must have the glass. How much will you sell it for?"

The missionary did not want to sell his mirror. But she insisted so strongly that in the end he thought it would be better to sell it to her and thus avoid trouble. A price was set, and she took the glass. Fiercely she said, "I will never have it making faces at me again." She threw it down and broke it to pieces.

Men and women hated the Lord Jesus Christ for much the same reasons. That is why they hate him today and hate the Bible. Christ and God's Word reveal our true selves, and we do not like the revelation.

There is a second reason why the world hates Christ, and that is his works. He indicates this by saying, "If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father" (v. 24). In this case, as in the previous verses, it is not that men and women actually were sinless before Christ's coming; that is clearly untrue. It is that his works, like his words, brought sin to light.

This word "miracles" is very significant in John's Gospel. Earlier in these studies we looked at the important term "signs," John's characteristic term for a miracle. John uses "signs" seventeen times, but he uses "miracles" (often translated "works" in the NIV) twenty-seven times; and of those twenty-seven times, eighteen apply exclusively to what Jesus has done. On occasion this word refers to what we would term miracles, for example, "I did one miracle, and you are all astonished" (7:21). But it also refers to all that Christ does, as when he prays to the Father, saying, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (17:4). The distinct characteristic of this term is that the works are God's works. Thus, we find Christ saying, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does" (5:19). Just before healing the man who had been born blind he said we "must work the work of him who sent me" (9:4). When we put the term in this context, we see that the works of Jesus are the works of God and, therefore, the revelation of God. The works of God and the revelation of God are brought to their proper climax and completion in the ministry of Jesus.

This is precisely why the world hates Jesus. It hates him because he was doing the works of God; and the works of God, like the words of God, reveal our spiritual bankruptcy. Before we had Christ's works for comparison, our works looked pretty good. But next to his deeds, even the best of ours looks shabby.

In the final analysis, then, the hatred of the world for Christ's followers may be reduced to this. The world hates Christ's followers because it

hates Christ, and the world hates Christ because it hates God the Father.

Two Judgments

What will our reaction be at that point? If it is the reaction of the world, it might be that we should write off discipleship as a bad bet. Discipleship? That is a fine thought if it leads to glory with Christ. But hatred? Persecution? A cross? Who wants those? Would it not be better to simply walk a bit closer to the world and its ways and so escape the world's judgment?

That reaction seems wise, so long as we give no thought to God's assessment of the situation. Write God off, and the option of a pleasant and favored life seems preferable. But place God in the picture, give attention to his judgment, and the balance changes. For what is God's judgment?

It is suggested at the end of this passage by that verse in which Christ quotes from the Old Testament saying, "But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason'" (v. 25). The quotation here is either from Psalm 35:19 or Psalm 69:4, but the source is not significant. The significant thing is that in these verses God himself expresses a judgment upon the world's hatred of Christ and Christ's followers, saying that it is entirely without cause, groundless, unfair, without any justification. It is therefore blameworthy and culpable.

What will God do in the face of that situation? Will he ignore the injustice? Can he ignore it? He cannot. Rather, he will move against those who have hated or ignored his Son. He will judge them. And he will receive and honor those who have taken their place alongside Jesus and who in quiet faith and determination have borne the world's ridicule with him.

Finally, there is also a word for those who have taken their stand with Jesus and have known the world's hatred. If this has been true of you, you will know that the favor of the world is not worthy to be compared with the favor of Jesus toward his own and that the world's fellowship,

for all its joviality, cannot compare with our fellowship with Christ. You would not think of returning to what you were before you met Jesus. But hatred from others can have the effect of making one hard, and out of that hardness there can arise a desire to strike back in fierce retaliation. This is not Christ's way. Therefore, if you are in danger of this, remember that it is said of Christ, "They hated me *without reason.*" Then, in imitation of him, make sure that *you* give no cause to hatred either. Let such enmity as there is be provoked only by your fellowship with your Lord.

Chapter 197.
He Will... You Will

John 15:26-27

Could anything be more exciting than being a coworker with God? I hardly think so. Yet this is what is promised to every faithful Christian in the pages of God's Word. If your boss should call you up tomorrow morning and say, "I have been watching your work and have been very satisfied with it; I would like you to become a partner with me in directing the affairs of the company," you would be thrilled. You would be even more thrilled if the call should come from the President of the United States asking you to be a member of his cabinet or a special counsel in the area of your expertise. How much more delighted should we be, then, that the sovereign and eternal God has appointed us coworkers with him in carrying the gospel of salvation to this world!

Where does God say that we are appointed coworkers with him or with Jesus Christ in this ministry? The passage I am thinking of as I use that word is 2 Corinthians 6:1, in which Paul says, "As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain."

The idea also occurs in the words of Christ in the midst of the final discourses as he instructs his disciples concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit. Here Christ says, "When the Counselor comes, whom I will

send to you... he will testify about me. And you also must testify" (John 15:26-27). He will testify... you must testify. It is the combination of these two testimonies, however strange it may seem, that God uses to exalt Christ and draw men and women to him. And yet, lest we get too carried away in thinking about being coworkers with God, we need to note that the Lord mentions the Spirit's witness first and only after this does he mention our own. Our witness is necessary, but it is powerless without the presence and supernatural activity of God's own Spirit. Only he can illuminate the unregenerate mind and move the rebellious will of man to embrace our Savior.

Witness of the Spirit

How does the Holy Spirit bear his witness? Or, to put it in slightly different words, in what does the testimony of the Holy Spirit consist? There are two answers. One is the work of the Holy Spirit in directing the writing of the books of our Bible. The other is the Spirit's work in bringing those objective truths home to the subjective experience of the individual Christian.

The witness of the Spirit in directing the writing of the Bible is clearly involved in this section, for the next chapter goes on to speak of it explicitly. "When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you" (16:13-14). "The truth" that was to be revealed is the truth of the Christian gospel, centering in Jesus' ministry. It involved the past ("he will remind you," 14:26) and future ("he will tell you what is yet to come," 16:13). In this ministry there is special reference to the official role of the apostles as the recipients of the witness.

This is taught at several other key places in the Bible. Second Timothy 3:16 says: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." This verse teaches that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the result of the

direct breathing out of God and that the vehicle of that divine "spiration" was the Holy Spirit.

Similarly, 2 Peter 1:21 teaches that the Holy Spirit directed the human writers of the Bible so that the work they produced, while still in one sense the work of men, was nevertheless precisely what God himself desired. The verse says, "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

This puts the Bible in a category of its own, for it is not like other books. It is true, if we speak only on a human level, that from time to time human authors are what we may choose to call inspired. That is, they are wrestling with a problem and then suddenly are confronted with a great solution or with an exceptional way of stating what they desire to say. They write it. Later, when we come to what they have done, we are so impressed that we say, 'Well, he must certainly have been inspired when he wrote that." But this is a loose use of language, and it is not what we are speaking about when we say that the Bible is inspired. When we speak of the Bible being inspired we mean that in a unique way the Holy Spirit came upon the human authors so that what they produced was what God desired, both in the whole and in its parts. It is this that makes the Bible distinct.

The Internal Witness

There is also a second way in which the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. He continues to bear a witness (present tense) by speaking through the Bible to carry the truths of the Bible home to the individual human mind and heart.

The experience of this truth is what lay at the heart of, and was fundamentally new in, the Protestant Reformation. When the Reformers spoke of the unique authority of the Scriptures they spoke of *sola Scriptura* ("Scripture alone"). But this meant more to them than the simple idea that God had revealed himself to men through the Bible. The new element was not that the Bible, being given by God and

through the channel of his Holy Spirit, speaks with God's own authority. The Roman Church held to that as well as the Reformers. The new element was the Reformers' belief, substantiated by the explicit teaching of Scripture and by their own personal experience of Bible study, that the Bible interprets itself to God's people from within, due to the fact that the Holy Spirit has not ceased to speak through it to their hearts. It was this discovery that freed them from an improper and debilitating dependence upon traditions and the decrees of church councils. These may have had value, but they were ultimately unnecessary, for God is not only able to teach but also does teach his people without them.

What is this activity of God's Spirit? The Reformers called it "the internal witness of the Holy Spirit," for they wished to stress that it was the subjective or internal counterpart of the objective or external revelation embodied in the pages of the written Word of God.

Their own experience of Bible study taught them this, but they also noticed that this particular function of the Holy Spirit is repeatedly revealed in God's Word. For example, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). Or again, from the last discourses, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). Similarly, in his first epistle John writes of this, extending the principle from that special ministry of the Spirit toward the apostles to a more general ministry for all believers, "But you have an annointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.... As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him" (2:20, 27). Later in the same letter John adds, "It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth" (5:7).

Paul writes of the same reality. "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us

by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in words" (1 Cor. 2:12-13).

Comprehension, Conviction, Commitment

We may break this down a bit by asking, "When we say that the Holy Spirit speaks through the Bible to the individual heart, precisely what does the Holy Spirit do? What are the results of his ministry?" There are several answers.

First, the Holy Spirit gives *comprehension.* Apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit there is no understanding of spiritual things. The Bible is taught, but men and women do not comprehend it. The gospel is proclaimed forcefully, but the unregenerate consider it nonsense. What is wrong? Is it the nature of the Bible or the inability of the preacher? What is wrong is that the Holy Spirit has not yet granted understanding. This is what Paul is speaking about in 1 Corinthians 2 when he says, 'The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (v. 14). Without the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, the unregenerate comprehend nothing of the gospel. On the other hand, where the Holy Spirit is at work, understanding follows. This is true regardless of the obstacles to comprehension.

In his discussion of this theme, R. A. Torrey refers to it as the explanation of something that every experienced Christian worker has noticed. He speaks of sitting down beside a person who has expressed a desire to know more about salvation through Christ and of trying to explain the gospel. The Bible is opened. Texts that speak of Jesus as the atoning, risen, and returning Savior are shown, but the inquirer does not see it. The truths are those the person needs to see and believe in order to be saved, but he stares blankly. He sees nothing. The worker goes over it again, but still there is no understanding. A third time! Suddenly, with face lighted up, the person exclaims, "Oh, I see it. I see it. Jesus is God, and he died for me. I only have to believe it to be saved." He does believe it, and he is saved. What has happened? Torrey writes, "Simply

this, the Holy Spirit has borne his testimony and what was dark as midnight before is as clear as day now. This explains also why it is that one who has been long in darkness concerning Jesus Christ so quickly comes to see the truth when he surrenders his will to God and seeks light from him."

The second thing the Holy Spirit brings is *conviction.* This is necessary too because it is not enough merely to have a comprehension of spiritual things. Comprehension is necessary. But if we have a proper comprehension, this will involve an understanding of our own sin and we will need to be convicted of our sin. The next chapter speaks of this, for Jesus says, speaking of the Spirit, "When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned" (John 16:8-11).

America will never experience a great revival until there is a deep and disturbing recognition and confession of both personal and national sin. It is the Holy Spirit's work to bring such conviction.

Third, the Holy Spirit will also bring *commitment* to the Lord Jesus Christ. Having comprehended the gospel and having been convicted of sin to the point of repentance, the one to whom the Holy Spirit bears his witness then commits himself to Christ as Lord and Savior.

We have an example of this in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian treasurer. The Ethiopian had been to Jerusalem to worship God and while there had apparently bought a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He was sincere in his search, but he did not understand spiritual things, so he was puzzled by what he read on his way back to Ethiopia. God sent Philip to him. When Philip arrived, the Ethiopian had come to Isaiah 53: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was

taken from the earth" (Acts 8:32-33; cf. Isa. 53:7-8). He wanted to know of whom the prophet was speaking.

Philip taught him about Jesus and how he died for our sin, as Isaiah indicates. At this point, having been given understanding and having been convicted of his own sin, the Ethiopian asked to be baptized as a sign of his commitment. He said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (v. 37). This is what happens when the Holy Spirit is at work.

Is he at work in your heart? Do you know that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God, as he claimed to be, and do you understand that he died in your place, the just for the unjust, that he might save you from sin? Are you convicted of sin so that you are sorry for sin and willing to turn from it? Have you reached the point of committing yourself to Jesus? If you have, say, "Lord Jesus Christ, I am a sinner, but I believe that you are the Son of God and that you died for me. Accept me now as one of your children and help me to follow you faithfully until my life's end."

Human Witness

Finally, there is a word here for those who have heard the witness of the Spirit and responded to it. The Holy Spirit is witnessing, but you must also bear witness, and it is only because of his witness that yours has promise of succeeding. This is why Jesus, immediately after he has said, "The Spirit... will testify about me," goes on to add, "and you also must testify" (v. 27).

Moreover, there is a reminder of what constitutes an effective human witness. There are three elements. First, there must be *assurance* that the gospel is indeed true. This is suggested in Christ's reference to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth, for if the Spirit of truth has borne his witness to your mind and heart, one of the inevitable results will be your conviction that what he has testified to you concerning Christ is factual. There can be no true witness on your part without that, just as there can be no true conversion without it. John R. W. Stott, Rector Emeritus of All Souls' Church in London, has said correctly, "No man or woman is truly converted who is not intellectually converted." So,

too, there is no true witness that is not at its heart a proclamation of facts that the witness knows beyond any doubt to be true.

Second, there must be a *personal experience* of that truth. In other words, it is not enough merely to be intellectually convinced of something, important as that may be. It is also necessary to have entered into the reality of it personally. This, Jesus indicates when he says, referring to the witness of the apostles, "And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning." Today neither you nor I can reenact the experience of the apostles. But it is not altogether different to say that we must experience the Lord Jesus Christ as they did. Certainly we must spend time with him through our periods of personal Bible study and prayer. And we must attempt to put into practice what we learn of him in those sessions.

Finally, there must be a *verbalized testimony.* That is, you must speak about these things to others. It is not enough merely to be convinced of the truth of the Christian faith and have experienced it yourself. You must seek to tell others what you have known and experienced.

Chapter 198.
No Strange Trial

John 16:1-4

Many times in my ministry I have had occasion to speak of the liberal church as "the secular church." But to be perfectly honest, I must point out that there are areas in which the evangelical church is also secular. One of these is in some forms of evangelism. By this I mean that we are inclined to present the gospel in such a favorable light that the disadvantages (from a human point of view) of following Christ are forgotten. Granted that in spiritual terms there are no disadvantages. Spiritually, all we lose is our sin, and in its place we gain the fullness of God's salvation. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the unregenerate person there is a cost to discipleship, for it means leaving

anything that might deter us from God's will for our life, taking up our cross, and following Jesus.

Jesus stated the cost clearly, as we know. For example, at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, in those verses that delineate the character of those who should be his disciples, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice, and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:10-12). In these verses, Jesus indicates that the normal expectation for one who follows him is persecution.

Moreover, this is what the disciples, who listened to Jesus on that occasion, learned from him and remembered vividly. Thus, we find that the beatitude about persecution is quoted twice in 1 Peter, once in chapter 3 ("But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed," v. 14) and once in chapter 4 ("If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed," v. 14). Peter adds, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you, are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you partake in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (4:12-13). Paul, who had himself endured much persecution (2 Cor. 11:22-33), writes to Timothy, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). To some he says, "For it has been granted to you on the behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him" (Phil. 1:29).

Forewarned and Forearmed

It is along precisely these lines that the Lord Jesus Christ speaks of persecution in the verses that open the sixteenth chapter of John. He has already spoken of persecution once (in 15:18-25), but now he returns to the same theme, explaining that he has done so in order to forewarn and thus forearm the disciples. He says, "All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a

service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you" (16:1-4).

Clearly these verses are a continuation of the disclosure of the coming hatred of the world for Christ's followers, recorded in the previous chapter. But they are not merely a repetition of what was said earlier. They have emphases of their own. One new emphasis is the specifics of the coming persecutions: excommunication and murder. The other, quite startling revelation is that these will be inflicted upon the disciples, not by the secular world but by religious persons.

Excommunication

The first matter, then, is this penalty of excommunication, which Christ indicates by saying, "They will put you out of the synagogue" (v. 2). To gain the full force of this we must understand that exclusion from the synagogue was not at all like a person being denied membership in a local church congregation today. To be denied membership in a contemporary American church, or even to be put out of it for one reason or another, is not serious. There are always other denominations. There are even other churches with different attitudes within the same denomination. And if worse comes to worst and you are unable to gain admission to any church, it is still no big loss, for it is possible to function well in American society without any church membership.

This was not the case in the matter of excommunication from the Jewish synagogue. For one thing, excommunication meant separation from the spiritual life of Israel. For the one who was excommunicated there would be no worship, no sacrifices, not even the reading of the Scripture—for the Bible was not available to normal people. The Scriptures could be found and heard only in places of worship. To be excommunicated meant losing those benefits and more. It meant losing all that Paul talks about in Romans, when he says of the Jewish people,

'Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises" (Rom. 9:4).

Moreover, the banning of an individual from the synagogue would have a devastating effect upon his social life and his economic well-being. Former friends would shun him, considering him worse than a pagan. He would be exiled from his family, ostracized. He would lose his job or else, if he was self-employed, his customers. He would even be refused the right of honorable burial. So in speaking of excommunication from the synagogue Jesus was warning his disciples against a threat with fearsome consequences.

The unique thing about this (and the following example of murder) is that, according to Christ, the persecution was to come from religious people, in this case from Judaism's spiritual leaders. This is worth noting, for it is the fact that persecution comes from our religious superiors that makes it so emotionally devastating. Persecution can also be bad if it comes from the secular world, but it does not strike us at the same point. It is external. When it comes from the religious authorities, it strikes inwardly, for the argument is always that they, not we, are the true church and have the true religion. It is the persecuted one that is always called a heretic.

And sometimes he is. Consequently, the persecuted one (if he is at all honest and even a bit humble) must find himself asking, "Are the authorities right? Can I actually be on the right track with all this great weight of opinion and tradition against me?"

At this point I have been greatly helped by reading the exposition of John 16 by Martin Luther, for Luther felt the weight of such opinion in his own excommunication by the Roman church of the sixteenth century. We usually think of Luther in his strongest moments, because he is the hero of the Reformation. We think of him as unaffected by the papal decrees. But Luther was not unaffected. Rather, he portrayed himself in the role of Jeremiah, who was required to stand before the Judaism of his day and declare it bankrupt, adding that God's judgment was quickly coming upon Judah and the city of Jerusalem, but who was

shaken by his own stance and preaching. The leaders rebuked him saying that they were God's people. They even quoted Scripture to refute his prophecy, for had not God promised to David that there should never fail a king of Judah to sit upon his throne? Luther found himself asking, as did Jeremiah, "Am I to stand up alone and preach against your people, your kingdom, your priests, and your Word? For that, of course, is where your name is; they have your Law, your temple, and both the spiritual and the worldly government, ordained by you yourself. Who am I to oppose singlehandedly all that is God's? I would rather say that they are right, retract my preaching, or at least keep silence." Luther understood the force of the taunts against him: "You are a heretic and an apostle of the devil. You are preaching against God's people and the Church, yes, against God himself." This must affect every sensitive Christian. Consequently, this is where the pain of this particular persecution comes in.

What does one do in these circumstances? Fortunately for the Reformation, Luther was also sensitive to Scripture, for he replied that the only ground on which a true servant of God can hold his own against such logic is that which Paul sets down in Romans 9:6, 7—"For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children." Persecutors always claim to be the true church, the people of God, but the claim alone does not make it so. There is an old German proverb that says, "Not all who carry long knives are cooks." In the same way, not all who lay claim to the title "church" are *the* church. Not all who wear ecclesiastical garb and who preach sermons are God's ministers.

Who are God's ministers? They are those, says Luther, who confess Christ and his work, as the Bible presents them. The true church is composed of those who so believe. The Bible, which is the Word of God, is the standard. On that standard one can correctly ask, not how many persons teach a certain doctrine or even how important are those who teach it, but rather, "What are the doctrines they teach?"

We need people to ask that question today and then to stand by what the Bible teaches. The weakness of the churches in our time is that those

within the various denominations will not evaluate the opinions and programs of those denominations by the Word of God and then stand against all that is in opposition to it. So long as this is true the churches will never be strong. Moreover, there will be persecution.

What then? Well, if God in his infinite wisdom permits those who merely profess the name of "church" to excommunicate, persecute, or otherwise relegate to the sidelines those who are determined to live by the Bible's authority, let it happen. Our task is to be forewarned and faithful.

Killed in God's Service

The second specific mentioned by the Lord Jesus Christ is murder. Obviously this is not always the experience of Christ's followers—-Jesus speaks only of a "time" when this will happen—but it has been far more common than most people realize. In the early years some of the apostles and many normal believers were killed by the Jewish authorities or by Jewish instigation. Later execution was inflicted by Rome, at first in random fashion and then in a more systematic way as in the cities of Lyon and Vienne in southern France. Under Decius and Diocletian the killing of Christians became the policy of the Empire. Persecutions filled the Middle Ages, climaxing in the Reformation period. In more modern times there have been deaths in pagan lands, in tribal settings, and even in the more sophisticated countries of the modern East and West.

The interesting dimension in all this is that the killing of Christians is almost entirely by religious people and for religious reasons. It is as Christ said: "Anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God" (v. 2). Luther in his vigorous manner comments, "It pains one beyond measure that the Christians, who undergo such suffering, must die not only without any sympathy but also amid the greatest ignominy, derision, and mockery, yes, amid all the joy and exultation of the world, which sings nothing but *Deo gratias* and *Te Deum laudamus* when it happens."

Rejoice! Rejoice!

What is it that can allow a Christian to rejoice in persecutions, even such severe persecutions as these Christ mentions? There are several answers. First, persecution demonstrates to the Christian and others that *the Christian is identified with Christ.* This is involved in Christ's explanation of the world's conduct in verse 3: "They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me." In other words, here is another statement of that radical distinction between Christ's own and the world that was introduced at the start of chapter 13 and that has characterized most of the teaching in this section of the Gospel. On the one side is the world, which knows itself but which does not know God. On the other side are believers, who are known of God and who know God, but who are not known by the world and are, in fact, even hated by it. To be hated by a world that does not know either the Father or Christ is therefore a mark of being identified with both of them.

Second, the Christian can rejoice in persecutions because he knows that they are not accidents but rather that *God has certain purposes.* This is one whole point of Christ's teaching in this section, for here he is telling of the persecutions to come in order that the disciples "should not be offended" and that, when the time should come, they might "remember that I warned you." This means that through the coming persecutions the disciples' faith would be strengthened.

Another purpose is growth in practical holiness, for persecutions strip away the unnecessary dross in our lives and draw us closer to Jesus. Peter knew this. He had heard Christ teach it. Then he experienced it in his own life and in the lives of those who had come to faith under his ministry. Thus, when some of these people went through persecutions, he wrote to them about it, saying, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do

not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy" (1 Peter 1:6-8). Peter was pointing out that persecution is the crucible in which God purifies the precious part of Christians' lives.

In one of my earlier writings I shared an illustration that Billy Graham has sometimes given of this principle. He tells of a friend who went through the Depression, losing a job, a fortune, a wife, and a home. But he was a believer in Christ and so held tenaciously to his faith, even though he was depressed and cast down by circumstances. One day in the midst of his agony he stopped to watch some men doing stonework for a large church in the city. "What are you going to do with that?" he asked a man who was busy chiseling a piece of triangular stone.

The workman stopped and pointed to a small opening near the top of the spire. "See that little opening up there near the top?" he asked. "Well, I'm shaping this down here so that it will fit in up there." The friend said that tears filled his eyes as he walked away from the workman, for it seemed that God had spoken to him personally to tell him that he was perfecting him for heaven through his earthly ordeal.

The third reason why a Christian can rejoice in persecutions is that they more than anything else allow the believer to show forth the *supernatural radiance of the Christian life.* If all is going well in your life and you rejoice, what is so remarkable about that? But if all goes wrong and you rejoice, that is remarkable and others will notice. Paul and Silas sang praises to God at midnight in the jail at Philippi. The jailer had seen many prisoners. He had seen sullen prisoners, rebellious prisoners, hopeful prisoners, dejected prisoners. But I am sure that he had never seen prisoners who could rejoice in the midst of severe beatings and captivity, as Paul and Silas were doing. Thus, when the Lord subsequently opened the gates of the prison to permit the faithful missionaries to leave it, the jailer fell at their feet demanding, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He had seen Jesus in them.

Chapter 199.
Witness for the Prosecution

John 16:5-11

One great teaching of the Word of God is that believers may always reckon their losses among their greatest gains. This is true in the ultimate sense, for Jesus said, "Whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35). But it is true in regard to lesser things also, things like disappointments, sickness, financial setbacks, persecution. The difficulty is that we often do not believe this and so sorrow at what seems to be a great loss.

This was true for the first disciples, as our text indicates. God was sending the Holy Spirit to them through the departure of Christ, and yet they were sorrowful. He had prepared a great gift for them, but they could think only of their loss. They were despondent. Jesus, who knew their sorrow, began to teach them once more about the Holy Spirit. Previously he had spoken of the time when he had been with them. "Now," he says, "I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not some to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (vv. 5-7). These verses lead into the longest discussion of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to be found in John's Gospel, a discussion in which a twofold ministry of the Spirit is unfolded: first, a ministry to the world and, second, a ministry to the apostles. This study deals with the first of these two activities.

The Spirit and the World

The question for us is: What does the Holy Spirit do in relationship to the world? Obviously, the answer is in verse 8 and in those verses that follow—"When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment." But what does this mean? How does the Holy Spirit "convict" the world of anything?

The verb that lies behind our word "convict" has two main meanings: "to reprove" or "to convince." The meaning must be determined from the context. If the translation "to reprove" is chosen, the idea will be that of reproving someone or some group of people for an error previously held or a wrong previously committed. If the translation "to convince" is chosen, the idea will be that of convincing them of some truth previously unknown or unrealized. In this passage the choice would therefore be between a work of the Holy Spirit in rebuking the world for its sin, without any necessary thought of salvation, or a work of conviction concerning the true state of things so that the world might turn from sin to faith in Jesus as the Savior.

Which is to be chosen? The fact that it is the "world" that is spoken of favors the idea of conviction. In John, the word "world" most often denotes non-Christians, that is, the world of people in opposition to God. If that is the case here, then a conviction of the world for its sin seems appropriate. Unfortunately, the matter is not as simple as that. For one thing, nowhere else in the Scriptures is the Holy Spirit pictured as having such a ministry to the unregenerate world. He is said to restrain the world's evil. He is said to convince those whom God has chosen to be his own of their sin and so lead them to repentance and faith. But the work of convicting the world for sin is always associated, not with the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the present day, but with the exposure of sin by God before the judgment seat of Christ. Second, not all items mentioned in the verses that follow this are reprehensible, and therefore the idea of conviction is not applicable. True, the world can be reproved for its failure to believe on Jesus Christ (v. 9), but it can hardly be reproved of righteousness because Christ goes "to [his] Father" (v. 10) or of judgment because "the prince of this world now stands condemned" (v. 11). By contrast, the world can be *convicted* of sin, righteousness, and judgment as they are connected with these items.

For these reasons it seems best to consider this passage as involving a slight departure from John's normal use of the word "world." True, it is still the world of men in opposition to God upon whom the Spirit works. But the work is that divine power of conviction that, in spite of

the darkness and resistance of the carnal mind, brings those whom God has given to Christ to repentance. In this light the passage becomes the greatest statement of the Spirit's work of conviction and regeneration in the entire Bible and a ground of great encouragement to us, as it undoubtedly also was to the apostles.

Conviction of Sin

The first reality the Holy Spirit convicts the world of is sin, and Jesus immediately gives the explanation: "because men do not believe in me" (v. 9). This may mean, "He will convict the world of wrong ideas of sin which they have because they do not believe," "He will convict the world of its sin because, without this conviction, they do not believe," or "He will convict the world of the sin of unbelief." Any of these three translations is possible, and John may even be suggesting more than one, as is his manner. But if the idea of conviction with a view to salvation is the major thought of this passage, then the second interpretation is primary, for the root sin is that which puts self at the center of things and therefore spurns belief. It is only as this is brought to light that there is salvation.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world in two senses. First, like a prosecuting attorney he secures a verdict of "guilty" against the world. But then, second, the Holy Spirit also brings this guilt home to the human consciousness so that men and women are disturbed by sin and seek alleviation from it.

An example of this ministry occurs on the occasion of the Holy Spirit's coming in power on the day of Pentecost. The disciples had been gathered together in one place awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit. He had come upon them visibly, as a result of which they went into the streets of Jerusalem where Peter preached a sermon. Peter told how this coming of the Spirit was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel and how the Holy Spirit was given in order that men and women might call on Jesus and be saved. He preached Jesus, concluding his sermon by saying, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." We are then told that

"when the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:36-37). When Peter answered their question, three thousand believed and were saved.

This was a remarkable response, but it was not due to Peter's brilliant analysis of the gospel or to his eloquence. If he had preached this sermon the day before, nothing would have happened. No one would have believed. He and the others would have been laughed at. What made three thousand believe? The answer is that the Holy Spirit had come and had begun to do his work of conviction of sin in the world. This is why they were "cut to the heart" and asked, "What shall we do?"

We cannot convict men and women of sin. Neither can those to whom the gospel is preached convict themselves. It is this that lay at the heart of the controversy between Pelagius and Augustine and later between Arminius and the followers of Calvin. Neither Pelagius nor Arminius denied that salvation was by grace, for they were not ready to assert that Jesus did not have to die, the Bible did not have to be given, the Holy Spirit did not have to be sent, and so on. But they did deny that it was all of grace in the sense that man makes no move toward God unless God first convicts and then draws him. Pelagius put it like this. He said that the will of man is always free and that it can therefore always choose or reject anything offered to it. As to the gospel, grace makes the offer. But the ultimate criterion by which any individual is either saved or lost is his will. Pelagius did not understand that it is impossible for the individual either to become aware of his sin or to understand and respond to the gospel without the Holy Spirit's previous and supernatural activity in his life. He has a will, but without the Spirit's activity the will is always deflected from God to its own destruction.

In one of his books Reuben A. Torrey illustrates this from his own experience. At one point in his ministry a number of officers of the Chicago Avenue Church, where he served, were burdened over the fact that there was so little profound conviction of sin in their meetings. There were conversions, Torrey noted, but few were coming with an apparently overwhelming conviction of sin. One night one of the

officers said, "I am greatly troubled by the fact that we have so little conviction of sin in our meetings. While we are having conversions and many additions to our church, there is not that deep conviction of sin that I like to see. So I suggest that we, the officers of the church, meet from night to night to pray that there may be more conviction of sin in our meetings."

The suggestion was taken up, and the meetings began. A few days later on a Sunday evening
Torrey noticed a man in the congregation whom he had not seen before. He was showily dressed. He had a large diamond blazing from his shirt front. Torrey rightly guessed that he was a gambler. As the preacher held forth, this man kept his eyes riveted on him. After the service Torrey went to the room where they always dealt with inquirers and there found this gambler. He was terribly agitated. "I don't know what is the matter with me," he groaned. "I never felt this way in my life. I was starting out this afternoon to go to Cottage Grove Avenue to meet some men and spend the afternoon gambling. But as I passed the park some of your young men were holding an open-air meeting, and I stopped to listen. I saw one man testifying whom I had known in a life of sin, and I waited to hear what he had to say. When he finished I went on down the street. I had not gone far when some strange power took hold of me and brought me back and I stayed through the meeting. Then this gentleman spoke to me and brought me over to your church. I heard you preach." Here he stopped and sobbed, crying, "Oh, I don't know what is the matter with me. I feel awful. I never felt this way before in my life."

"I know what is the matter with you," Torrey replied. "You are under conviction of sin, for the Holy Spirit is dealing with you." Torrey then pointed him to Christ, and the man asked Jesus to forgive his sins and was born again. It was the beginning of many striking conversions in the Chicago Avenue Church.

There is one more thing about this convicting work of the Holy Spirit in relation to sin. It is that the sin of which the Holy Spirit convicts men is the sin of unbelief. "In regard to sin, because they do not believe in

me,"Jesus says. Notice that it is not conviction of the sin of gambling, though that may come in time. It is not the sin of adultery, or drunkenness, or pride, or stealing primarily, but the sin of refusing to believe on Jesus. Why is this? It is not because the other sins are not sin or that they need not be repented of and renounced, for they must be. It is just that belief in Christ, the one thing God requires for salvation, is that which is hardest for the natural man even to acknowledge, let alone attain. Does the average unbeliever look on unbelief as sin? Not at all! If anything is true, it is the opposite. He generally looks upon unbelief as a mark of his supposed intellectual sophistication. "I am glad that you can believe those things," he says with an air of condescending superiority (he really means, "that you can believe that nonsense"), "but I cannot." He thinks it a matter for pride that he is an agnostic or an atheist. Or, if he does not take that tack, he looks to you for pity, saying, "I wish I could believe as you do, but I can't. There must be something wrong with me."

Real conversions take place when both these excuses are withered away by the Spirit's heat. As Torrey says, "When the Holy Spirit touches a man's heart, he no longer looks upon unbelief as a mark of intellectual superiority; he does not look upon it as a mere misfortune; he sees it as the most daring, decisive and damning of all sins and is overwhelmed with a sense of his awful guilt in that he had not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Christ's Righteousness

Second, the Holy Spirit is said to convict men and women of righteousness. "In regard to righteousness," says Jesus, "because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer" (v. 10). There are two ways in which this can be taken.

On the one hand, it can mean that the Holy Spirit will show the world what true righteousness is, an action made necessary by the fact that Christ is no longer here to demonstrate the meaning of righteousness in his own person. Apart from Christ none of us has any understanding of what God's righteousness is. We think of it in terms of human goodness,

for we imagine that some people have 10 percent goodness, others have 30 percent, still others have 60 or 70 percent, and then there is Jesus, the best of all, who scores 100. But this is not what God's goodness is. If this were the case, then confrontation with Christ would have the effect of making us want to try harder. We would see that we are not as good as he is but that he represents what is possible. We would try to be better. This, however, is not what happens when men and women meet Jesus. What happens is that they are impressed with the totally different characteristics of his righteousness and with the fact that for them it is totally unattainable. The reaction, rather than being a renewed determination to try harder, is despair: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Because the Lord Jesus Christ is no longer with us here on earth, it takes another divine personality, the Holy Spirit to create this awareness in the world.

On the other hand, there is another way in which these words can be taken. They can be taken as showing, not primarily what righteousness is but rather where that righteousness can be found. It cannot be found here. We know only human righteousness. But it can be found in Christ, who was once here but is now at the Father's right hand.

I do not know which of these is to be preferred, and again both may be possible. However, if the second meaning is possible, even in a secondary sense, then it suggests something interesting, something which Spurgeon saw and wrote about in one of his sermons. Spurgeon has pointed out that in human affairs, if a person is convicted of wrongdoing, the next step is judgment. If the jury renders a verdict of guilty, the next words are those of the judge, who says, 'The defendant will be remanded to the keeping of the sheriff, and this court will reconvene next Tuesday for sentencing." But notice God's procedure. It is true that the conviction of sin is followed by judgment. Verse 11 does follow verse 9, but God interpolates a process. It is the provision of righteousness in Christ, so that the one who believes on Christ might be saved from judgment. Spurgeon writes, "The Lord takes a man, even when he is sinful and conscious of that sin, and makes him righteous on the spot, by putting away his sin and justifying him by the righteousness

of faith, a righteousness which comes to him by the worthiness of another who has wrought out a righteousness for him."

So here is a great promise: not only that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin, which neither you nor I can do, but that he also will direct them to Christ where alone that true righteousness, which we are all lacking, can be found.

Satan Judged

The final aspect of the Spirit's work mentioned in these verses is to convict the world "in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned" (v. 11). Once again, there are difficulties of interpretation. But the best view seems to be that the Holy Spirit will convince the world that there is such a thing as judgment, which is proved by the judgment of Satan and the breaking of his power at the cross.

No one wants to believe in judgment. We want to think that we can do what we wish with impunity and that no day of reckoning will come. Sometimes we are even encouraged in this by the thought that God does not seem to judge immediately and that evil often seems to go unpunished. But this is false thinking. It is true that God does not visit his judgments upon the sinner immediately and that evil often seems to go unpunished. God is longsuffering in his judgments. Still, they come eventually and inevitably, and of this, God's judgment upon Satan is proof. In his second epistle, Peter makes the same point concerning false teachers, showing that God judged the fallen angels, the world of Noah's time, and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He then concludes by saying, "The Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment" (2 Peter 2:9).

If the individual will not come to Christ, who has died for him in order that his sin might be punished and that God's own righteousness might be applied to his account, then he will experience such judgment. How much better it is to come to Christ now in this the day of grace.

Human Channels

There is one last point. It is true that this passage is primarily about the work of the Holy Spirit by which he convicts the world of sin and thus points men and women to Jesus Christ as the Savior. But notice that, while it is true that it is the Holy Spirit who convicts men and women of sin, he nevertheless does it through us. Jesus indicates this in these verses, saying, "It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes [to you], he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (vv. 7-8). This means that the Lord is sending the Holy Spirit to believers and that it is as he works through them and in them that he convicts the world.

Every conversion recorded in the Book of Acts was through the agency of someone who was already saved. Jesus bore witness to the Twelve. They bore their witness on Pentecost and the days following. Even Paul, that great witness who had such an unusual conversion while on the way to Damascus to persecute Christians, was converted through others. For, in advance of his experience, he had witnessed the stoning of Stephen and had heard his great sermon, recorded in Acts 7. And even after his experience, while he was in Damascus, Ananias was sent to him as the human instrument through whom the Holy Spirit then did his work. Cornelius also fits this pattern. True, he had witnessed an angel. But the angel did not tell him the gospel. Rather, the angel said, "Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved" (Acts 11:13-14).

This is God's way: by the power of his Spirit working through human channels, like you and me. Are you his instrument? You can be. Draw near to him; ask him to cleanse you. Allow him to make of you an unobstructed channel for his grace.

Chapter 200.
More Words to Come

John 16:12-15

In the second chapter of John there is a story with an interesting final line. The story is of Jesus changing the water in six stone waterpots to wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and it ends with the remark of the master of ceremonies to the bridegroom after he had drunk the wine Jesus made. He said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now" (v. 10). The situation is the same as that which we find in John 16:12-15.

We are nearing the end of the final discourses. Only a summary follows. So the startling thing is that Jesus introduces a new and totally unexpected subject. What is more, it is in a sense the best of all he has been saying.

How can it be the best? That is a hard question to answer when we think of what he had been teaching, particularly in these last discourses. He had taught about heaven. He had taught how to get there. Then he had taught about the works that those who were his disciples should do. He had taught about prayer, saying that whatever the disciples should ask in his name he would do. Best of all, he had taught about the Holy Spirit, how he should come after Christ had himself returned to heaven and how he should comfort the disciples, teach them, cause them to be spiritually fruitful, and finally convict the world of its sin in order that it might find righteousness in Christ and escape God's judgment. It is at

this point, after all that teaching, that the words we are studying come in.

How can this last subject be the best of all? The answer is in the nature of the subject itself: Christ's promise of even more teachings to come. Jesus says, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come" (vv. 12-13). In other words, although Jesus had taught his disciples what seem to us to be many significant doctrines, there were nevertheless many more things still to be taught.

Although he was departing, it would be the work of the Holy Spirit to communicate these teachings.

A New Revelation

Even at this point, we have not really captured the full wonder of Christ's promise, however, for by reading these verses closely, particularly in the original language, we find that it is not simply that the Holy Spirit was going to teach the disciples in the same sense, for instance, that the Holy Spirit may be said to teach us. He would presumably do that for the disciples also, as for us, but that is not what the verses mean. The true sense emerges when we learn that an important word has been dropped out of verse 13 in several versions. It is the word "the," and it comes before "truth." When we understand this, we see that it is not just into some general idea of truth that the Holy Spirit is said to be coming to guide the apostles, but rather into all "the truth," that is, into a definite body of material centering on Christ. This, we recognize, is nothing other than the New Testament. So the promise is that the Holy Spirit would be the vehicle of a new revelation through those specifically commissioned to this ministry. The Revised Standard Version and the New English Bible render this verse correctly.

This is startling. If the disciples understood what Jesus was saying, it was startling to them, for they were Jews and were therefore well aware of the unique, divine character of the Old

Testament. They knew, as the Book of Hebrews says, that "God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways" (1:1). They knew that the law had come "through Moses" (John 1:17). They believed that the law was "holy, righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12). This law was in every Jewish synagogue. It was God's greatest gift to Israel. How, then, could there be a further revelation? It would have seemed unnecessary, unbelievable. Yet this is precisely what Christ was promising.

This is not a promise of inspiration that is made generally to all Christians in all periods of the church. If we think like that, we fall into William Barclay's error. If you turn to Barclay's discussion of this passage, you find that he says two things. First, he says that these verses teach that "revelation is bound to be a progressive process." Expressed rightly, that is true. God has revealed himself progressively in a certain sense in the writings that compose our Bible, but Barclay takes it to mean, first, that the earlier revelations were imperfect or wrong (at least in part) and, second, that there is no end to God's revelation. In combination, this means that Jesus is still imparting truth today and that this truth can modify, correct, or supercede the truth previously given. This is not Jesus' teaching, nor is it suggested or permitted by this passage. On the contrary, Jesus is teaching that the Holy Spirit would lead the disciples into a supplementary but definitive new revelation that thereafter would be the church's authoritative standard of doctrine.

The second thing Barclay says in his commentary is that the operation of the Holy Spirit to lead us into truth applies in all areas. He gives some examples. First, he notes that when H. F. Lyte wrote the hymn "Abide with Me," he had no feeling of actually composing the verses. Instead, he wrote them—so Barclay says—as if by dictation. Next, Barclay talks about music, noting that Handel said of his writing the Hallelujah Chorus of the *Messiah:* "I saw the heavens opened, and... God sitting on the Throne." Finally, Barclay adds that the same is true of the scientist who discovers something that will help the world and make life better for the human race.

We have to make a distinction here, however, for it is not that "Abide with Me" is not a beautiful hymn, or that the Hallelujah Chorus is not truly an inspiring composition, or that a scientist may not be guided by God to discover something that will be beneficial to humanity. Certainly the Holy Spirit works in that way. He works in every area of life. But these things are in a different category from what the Lord is talking about in John 16:12-15. What the Lord is promising to do here is to work by the Holy Spirit in the apostles to give us our New Testament. This revelation is authoritative and inerrant, as the others (even if we refer to them by the terms "revelations" or "inspirations") are not.

This is a point at which we have to allow the whole weight of the Word of God to come to bear.

Reuben A. Torrey has a good discussion of this in his book *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit.* He points out, first, that there is a diversity of gifts according to the Word of God and that this diversity relates to different positions in the church and church history. Torrey turns to 1 Corinthians to show this. Thus, in 12:4-6, Paul says, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men." Later in the chapter, while still thinking about these gifts, he writes of the various people involved. "And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?" (vv. 28-30). Paul here relates the gifts to the various offices, saying that some gifts apply to one office and other gifts to another. We therefore rightly expect that God gave the apostles their own particular function and gift.

Second, says Torrey, there are passages that teach that the particular function of the apostles was to receive the new revelation. An example is Ephesians 3:2-5. Again Paul is writing. "Surely you have heard about

the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets." Paul's point is that his teaching was profound not because he was a particularly brilliant person but because God had revealed this teaching to him. His unique role (along with the other apostles) was to receive and record this revelation.

Finally, Torrey makes the point that this revelation is embodied in words. Note what Paul says:
"This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words" (1 Cor. 2:13). This is the biblical picture. So we understand that in John 16 the Lord Jesus Christ is pointing to that day—it was not far off at that moment—when the Holy Spirit would speak through these apostles as he had spoken in time past unto the fathers by the prophets. In other words, there was to be a New Testament, a new chapter in the history of God's dealings with men.

Diverse Revelation

These verses also say something else. They tell about the nature of this new revelation, giving general categories of its content. These are three. Sometimes, as I read the notes in the Scofield Bible, I am not particularly impressed with what is written. But in this particular case the notes are remarkable. At the bottom of this page in my Bible we are told that Jesus outlined the general categories of the New Testament revelation in advance and that these are: historical, doctrinal, and prophetic. This is exactly right. The New Testament fulfills this pattern precisely.

First, there is a *historical* element to the New Testament. This is involved in verse 13, in which Jesus says of the Holy Spirit, "He will guide you into all [the] truth." That is, "He will guide you into the truth concerning me." In 14:26 the historical element is made even clearer,

for there Christ says, "He will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you." In other words, the disciples were likely to forget certain things that happened, but the Holy Spirit would bring these historical events to their minds. What events are these? Obviously, they are the events connected with Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Do we have that in the New Testament? Of course. This is the substance of the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John—and also Acts.

Christianity begins with a historical revelation. It is this that sets Christianity off from other religions. It sets it off from mythology. It sets it off from philosophy. These systems of thought conceive of religion largely as a pattern of ideas and of salvation as learning certain things. But this is not the essence of Christianity. Christianity has ideas, that is true; but the ideas are based upon fact, and the facts are determinative.

The historical basis also cuts Christianity off from an evolutionary religion. Such a religion says that people thousands of years ago had primitive ideas of God but that, as they grew in knowledge, their ideas of God grew and their writings about God showed progression. This went on and on up to the New Testament period and then beyond it to the point where today we can drop certain things we consider unworthy of a true conception of God and add other things we consider to be valuable. Christianity's historical base undercuts all that; the basis of the revelation is the historical action of God in history. This centers primarily in the cross of Christ. God did something at the cross. He did not just teach an idea. He did not just show himself in some vague way. He atoned for sin at the cross; he also revealed his love and showed his judgment. Any understanding of the faith that departs from that historical basis is heresy.

Doctrine

Second, there was also to be a *doctrinal* element in the New Testament. This is indicated by Jesus when he says, again of the Holy Spirit, "He will take what is mine, and make it known to you" or, as in 14:26, "He will teach you all things." Do we have that in the New Testament? Of course, we do. We have it in the Epistles, beginning with the great letter

to the Romans, which unfolds Christian doctrine in its fullest form, continuing through the Epistles that deal with particular problems in theology, and ending with those books that are pastoral in nature—1 and 2 Timothy; Titus; 1, 2, and 3 John; 1 and 2 Peter; and Jude.

This is also important, because, while it is true that we must stress facts, while it is true that we must say that Christianity differs from all other religions because of the fact that God has done something in history, still it is not just the mere fact of God's having done this that is important; it is also what the facts mean. Thus, we say that God came in Jesus. But the significance of that is that God is revealed in certain categories. Because of Jesus, we know God to be love, justice, compassion, mercy, and many other attributes. Or again, we say that Jesus died. True enough!
But that in itself is not significant. All men die. Why did he die? At this point we need teaching.

So the Epistles are given to show us why Jesus Christ died and what the full implications of this are. He died for sin. He died for our sin, in our place. Moreover, he died in order that he might call out a people destined to be conformed to his own image and to be with him forever. The Epistles teach these as well as other doctrines we need to learn.

Things to Come

Finally, there is the *prophetic* element. Jesus indicates this when he says at the end of verse 13, "And he will tell you what is yet to come." Do we have that in the New Testament? Yes, we have. We have it scattered throughout the New Testament in various references (Matthew 24; 25; Mark 13; Romans 11; 1 Corinthians 15; etc.), but particularly in the Book of Revelation.

What shall come when the Lord returns in power at the end of the age? There can be a preoccupation with prophecy that is debilitating. A person can become so fascinated with what is to come that he does not live for Christ now. Sometimes that happens. But the importance of prophecy is in the indication that God is still at work in history. He does not just deal with us in some static way so that our period of history is

absolutely identical with that of those who lived in an earlier period and with that of those who will come later. Rather, God is doing unique things in history—working with people, unfolding a plan—so that what each one does is important. Moreover, these workings are leading up to the day when the Lord will return, at which time God will have gathered his own out of the world and will have demonstrated the reality of the Christian faith in such a way that all will see that the Lord's way is the only way that anyone can be personally fulfilled and find true blessing.

These verses also tell us why this revelation—involving history, doctrine, and prophecy—has been given. The Lord indicates this by saying, "He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you" (v. 14). It is not just that we are told certain doctrines in order that we might know things. Nor are the end times revealed so that we can simply have a private inside track to the meaning of history. These things are taught to us in order that the Lord Jesus Christ might be glorified. This is the Holy Spirit's ministry. "He will not speak on his own," said Jesus, "he will... [take] from what is mine and [make] it known to you" (vv. 13-14).

As you study the Bible the Holy Spirit will continue to do the work he began in an authoritative way with the inspiration of the New Testament documents. The Holy Spirit, the true author of these books, will lead you to see the Lord Jesus Christ and bring you to the point of increasing obedience and service to him.

Chapter 201.
Joy in the Morning

John 16:16-22

Are you one of those people who always wakes up in the morning with a smile on your face and a buoyant spirit in your heart? I am not. So I confess that when I come to a verse like Psalm 30:5—"Weeping may

remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning"—I have to understand it in poetical terms. It is worth trying to do this, however, for the idea of joy after a nighttime of sorrow is an important biblical theme. We have it in the passage we come to now: "I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy."

In general terms, we understand what this means. It means that for a Christian, sorrow endures for just a time and then is replaced by a joy that no one can take from us. Unfortunately, when we study the entire passage more specifically, we soon find that there is some uncertainty as to what Jesus is referring. The first part of this passage speaks about "a little while" when the disciples will not see him and then "a little while" after which they will see him. But because this has several possible applications, it is probable that having read that passage we find ourselves in the position of the disciples, who said, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying" (v. 18).

As I look at these words I suspect that this ambiguity is intentional. It is not that the Lord is vague in his teaching, of course. He makes things as clear as he can possibly make them. It is rather that by means of such ambiguity he suggests more than one meaning. Here the Lord is talking about a little while when he will not be seen, a time marked by sorrow, and then after that space of time, another time in which he will be seen again and which will therefore be joyful. This apparently deliberate ambiguity suggests three different levels of interpretation. First, it can refer to Jesus' death and the days of his entombment, during which time he was not seen, and then the resurrection that follows with its renewed sight of him. Second, it can indicate the periods before and after Pentecost, for now, because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we see him in a spiritual way that was not possible previously. That is suggested by the tie-in of these verses with those preceding. Finally, it may describe the church age, this short time in which we do not see Christ with our physical eyes, but after which, when the Lord will return in glory, we will see him face-to-face and have earth's sorrows transmuted into eternal joy.

I would like to take each of those meanings, show how it is supported by the context, and trace its importance.

Death and Resurrection

First of all, then, these verses refer to the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the first and most obvious interpretation simply because Christ is here speaking to his disciples, trying to comfort them on the eve of his arrest and separation from them. They are going to sorrow, but he wishes to show them that very soon, following his resurrection, they will again be joyful.

Jesus has already talked along those lines. For example, in John 13 the Lord had been talking about his glorification, saying, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him" (v. 31). This refers to his exaltation to heaven by his crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension. But it is immediately followed by the words: "I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come" (v. 33). Peter understood this "little while" to be imminent even though he did not comprehend much more than that, for he asked, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later" (v. 36).

When we take the passage in this sense, we recognize that this was precisely the experience of these early disciples. Jesus was their friend. They loved him with a love that had grown intense because of his love for them and fellowship with them over the three-year period of his ministry. Then, although he had tried to prepare them for it, he was suddenly taken from them and crucified. They were plunged into despondency and near disillusionment.

There were multiple reasons for their great sorrow. First, they sorrowed because of their personal loss. They were warmly attached to him, and he was gone—gone forever, so they thought. Since they had left all to follow him and since he had become their all in place of what they had lost (and much more besides), they were left with a vacuum in their

lives. This was comparable to the kind of sorrow we have at the death of one greatly loved. Yet it was far more intense, because in this case it was the Lord of glory, Jesus Christ, who was removed.

Second, they sorrowed additionally because of the world's attitude to Christ's crucifixion. The
Lord alludes to this in John 16:20, saying, "You will weep and mourn while the world rejoices." In other words, the sorrow of the disciples would be intensified because the world, far from sorrowing at the loss of Jesus, actually rejoiced that he was now out of their way and would no longer be a bother to them. As the disciples sorrowed during this interim they knew that the scribes and Pharisees, those who represent the spirit of the world, were actually rubbing their hands in glee. They were saying, "At last we've gotten rid of him; we won't have him exposing us anymore. Things will get back to normal." The sorrow of the disciples was intensified because of that.

Third, their sorrow during those days must have been particularly acute because of their disappointments. Every time we catch a glimpse into what they were thinking about during this interim we are impressed with how disappointed they were. There is the story of the Emmaus disciples. They were on their way home. The Lord appeared to them on the way and asked why they were downcast. They told him about Jesus, explaining how he had been crucified by the leaders of the people. Then they uttered what is certainly one of the most poignant lines in Scripture, "But we had hoped he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). They had put so much of their hope in him and he had been taken away from them. Their hopes had been crushed.

Disappointment explains the attitude of Thomas, who said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it" (John 20:25). It was not that Thomas was particularly disbelieving. None of the other disciples believed either until they had seen Christ. It was only after he appeared that they had come to faith. But Thomas, in a bitterness born of acute disappointment, said, "You're not going to overcome my grief by some mystical story of a resurrection. I'm the one, let's not forget,

who said, 'If he goes up to Jerusalem, he will die; if we go with him, we must be prepared to die also.' I warned you about it. He died. So don't try to put me off with fairy tales." It was disappointment that made him speak that way.

The disciples experienced acute sorrow because of their loss, the joy of the world, and disappointments. But then came the resurrection, and their sorrow was changed into joy. It was not that their sorrow was followed by joy, that joy came afterward but what was sorrow still remained. No, the sorrow was itself changed into joy so that what had been the cause of their sorrow before was now in equal measure joyous. Before the resurrection the death of Christ appeared to be a total tragedy. It was meaningless to the disciples because they did not understand that this was God's atonement for the sin of the world. It was only the death of one they deeply loved. But when Jesus rose from the dead they understood that the cross was not a tragedy but a triumph. Did you ever notice as you have read the New Testament that the cross of Christ is never referred to in a tone of sorrow? It is true that when the disciples tell about their own feelings during the three days between the crucifixion and the resurrection, as they do in the Gospels, they reflect in a historical way that they sorrowed then. But afterward whenever they wrote about the cross they spoke of it not as a cause for sorrow but as a cause for joy. Paul even speaks of the cross as his "glory" (Gal. 6:14). If there were nothing but the crucifixion, glorious as that might be, we would not understand it and it would be a cause of sorrow for us. But having had a resurrection, having known that the One who was crucified and buried rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, as the Bible itself tells us, we rejoice in that the cross is now seen to be a victory.

This incidentally, is why Lent should not have the extraordinary and exaggerated character that it does in some circles. For some it becomes a kind of mock funeral for Christ in which they try to work themselves into a depressed state leading up to Good Friday. That is all artificial. There is nothing genuine about it. For Jesus is living, not dead; and

although we must remember the cross and its agony, we remember it as that great act that procured our salvation, and we rejoice in it.

Spiritual Sight

Second, we must refer these verses to Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit for the church age. This is not reading something into the passage, because it is suggested to us by the context. In the first part of this chapter the Lord has been talking about the Holy Spirit. He has talked about the ministry of the Holy Spirit, first, to the world—bringing some to faith in Christ, convicting them of sin and of righteousness and of judgment (vv. 7-11)—and then, second, also to the apostles in a special sense so that they might become vehicles of the New Testament revelation as they remembered, understood, interpreted, and recorded what Jesus had done (vv. 12-15). The verses end by saying that when the Holy Spirit comes he is not going to speak of himself but rather is going to speak of Jesus and make him known. Then, immediately following that and in the same context, the Lord begins to speak of the little while when we will not see him and then the little while after which we will see him. In this context we, therefore naturally think of the church age in which the Holy Spirit makes the Lord Jesus Christ visible to Christian people, not physically but spiritually, as he reveals the Lord to us in the pages of the Word of God.

Someone will perhaps say at this point, "But I do not see the Lord Jesus Christ even in a spiritual way. There are times when he is far from me. I would like to see him, to feel him close, but I am afraid that the Lord seems far away. He seems to be locked in a previous age of history." If that is the case, then you have to approach the Lord in the only way he can be found in this age, that is, through a study of the Word. This is really the burden of the passage as I understand it.

Moreover, there is a second part to that, for it is not enough that we just come to the Scriptures in a certain academic way and study them, important as that may be. Rather, as we find the Lord presented to us in the Scriptures, there must be that personal interaction with him that

brings us face-to-face with his holiness and causes us to turn from sin in order that we might go his way.

I am sure that this is what the author of Hebrews had in mind when, in the twelfth chapter, he talks about our "looking to Jesus, the author and perfector of our faith." Hebrews 11 is the great chapter on faith. You would think that by the time the author had come to the end of that chapter, having cited the great heroes of faith of the Old Testament, he would have stopped, taken a deep breath, and perhaps gone on to something entirely different. But that is not the way he was thinking. Rather, he thinks of a present application according to which we, like those previous heroes, should turn from sin and pursue that which is set before us by Jesus: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and say down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:1-2).

If being aware of Jesus is to turn sorrow into joy in the present age, it must be based, first, upon a study of the Scriptures, and second, upon a deliberate turning from anything that would hinder discipleship. It is turning from sin in order that we might press on to what is ahead.

When we talk along those lines it is almost impossible not to think also of that chapter in Philippians in which the apostle Paul says almost the same thing in giving his testimony. He has already said in the third chapter what it meant for him to become a Christian. It meant to have come to know Christ. Now he expresses his desire to know him even better: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (3:10). He concludes that section by saying, "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal

to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (3:13-14).

Our Blessed Hope

Third, there is also a sense in which this applies to the Second Coming. Even with the vision of Christ through the Holy Spirit in this age there is still often great cause for sorrow, because we have disappointments, personal loss, and sin; and that keeps us from God. But it is not permanent. Jesus is coming. It is only a little while. Then sorrow will be turned into joy. We tend to think that the return of Jesus Christ is delayed—it is because we are locked in time—but that is why that phrase "a little while" is so important. It seems to us at times, as it always seems to skeptics, that "everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation" (2 Peter 3:4). But this phrase says that the present state is only temporary. It is short, and after it is over all present sorrows will be turned into joy. The phrase "a little while" is mentioned seven times just in this one passage.

There is an obvious progression here. First, there is the revelation of the Lord at the time of the resurrection, a revelation that went beyond anything that the disciples had previously known. Second, there is the revelation of Jesus to his people during this age. This is even better. Jesus said, "It is for your good that I go away. Unless I go away the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). Finally, there is that perfect revelation of Jesus when he returns in his glory at the end of time. If the progression applies in that historical sense, it should also apply to our own personal relationship to and knowledge of Jesus. We should know him better this year than we did last year, and better next year than this year. That is what we should desire. Let us see that it is fulfilled as, by the grace of God, we study the Bible and seek to enter into a full knowledge of our Lord.

Chapter 202.

Another Prayer Promise

John 16:23-27

The verses that conclude the sixteenth chapter of John and, therefore, also the final discourses of Jesus with his disciples, are in the nature of a summary. That is, they produce no new themes but rather repeat with some variations that which has already been taught. This does not mean that these themes are unimportant, however. On the contrary, it means that they are of the greatest importance. For of all that Jesus has taught in these discourses it is these, rather than the other themes, that he brings forward once again and stresses in his final words prior to the arrest and crucifixion.

One theme is his own origin and destiny, that is, his full divinity both before and after the years of his incarnation. We find this in verses 28-30. A second theme is the assurance that those who follow Christ may have peace even though, as in the case of the disciples, they would all be scattered when he was seized by the temple authorities. This peace is based on his own victory over the world and is discussed in verses 31-33. In the verses we are to study now, Jesus again teaches his disciples about prayer.

Why is prayer important? Reuben A. Torrey answers that question comprehensively and wisely in a little book entitled *How to Pray*, listing eleven reasons: (1) Because there is a devil and because prayer is the God-appointed means of resisting him; (2) Because prayer is God's way for us to obtain what we need from him; (3) Because the apostles, whom God set forth to be a pattern for us, considered prayer to be the most important business of their lives; (4) Because prayer occupied a prominent place and played a very important part in the earthly life of our Lord; (5) Because prayer is the most important part of the present ministry of our Lord, since he is now interceding for us (Heb. 7:25); (6) Because prayer is the means God has appointed for our receiving mercy from him and of obtaining grace to help in time of need; (7) Because prayer is the means of obtaining the fullness of God's joy; (8) Because prayer with thanksgiving is the means of obtaining freedom from

anxiety and, in anxiety's place, that peace that passes understanding; (9) Because prayer is the method appointed for our obtaining the fullness of God's Holy Spirit; (10) Because prayer is the means by which we are to keep watchful and be alert at Christ's return; and (11) Because prayer is used by God to promote our spiritual growth, bring power into our work, lead others to faith in Christ, and bring all other blessings to Christ's church.

In these verses we find four teachings: (1) the nature of prayer, (2) the privilege of prayer, (3) the conditions of effective prayer, and (4) a new prayer promise.

The Nature of Prayer

The nature of prayer is indicated by the word "ask," which is repeated five times. Once it refers to asking something of Jesus. The remaining four times it refers to asking something of the Father in Christ's name. The interesting thing is that these two askings are treated as if they were parallel, meaning that Jesus was considering prayer to the Father as identical in its essential nature with the conversation the disciples had been having with him.

If we see this clearly, we see that prayer must be lifted out of some mysterious realm of religious rites or practice, where only special people can go, and instead be brought down to the common experience of normal men and women. It means that prayer is essentially a conversation in which we talk to God. "For," says Jesus, "in precisely the same way in which you have been asking questions of me during our time together, so shall you ask of God the Father after I return to heaven."

We get a feeling for the kind of questions we may ask the Father by seeing what the disciples had to say in the preceding chapters. "Lord, where are you going?" (13:36). "Why can't I follow you now?" (13:37). "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (14:5). "Lord, show us the Father" (14:8). "Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" (14:22). "What

does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?" (16:17). These questions were not very perceptive; they reveal much ignorance. But they are natural and quite unaffected. That is the point. They are an indication of what the tone of our own prayers should be.

The Privilege of Prayer

Second, these verses indicate something of the privilege of prayer. This is implied in what we have been saying about prayer's nature, for Christ's point is that now, as a result of his death and resurrection, those who will come in his name may come to the Father with the same freedom and boldness that had characterized his disciples' approach to him during the days of his earthly ministry. What is more, they may come knowing that their requests will be granted.

We must not think that the disciples had not prayed to God before Christ's resurrection.
Undoubtedly, the disciples had often asked the Father for things directly just as they had asked
Jesus for things directly. Jesus had even given them a prayer pattern that began with the words "Our Father in heaven" and that included the requests, "Give us today our daily bread,... forgive us our debts,... and lead us not into temptation" (Matt. 6:9-13). But before this the disciples had not asked anything of the Father in Christ's name. Now they are to do so and are to know that on that basis whatever they should ask the Father he would give them (v. 23). The next verse urges, "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete" (v. 24).

This verse puts the privilege of prayer on the same level as the verses from the fourteenth chapter which we considered earlier: "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (vv. 13-14).

The Conditions of Effective Prayer

The third teaching in these verses is the conditions of effective prayer, conditions embodied in the phrase "in my name," which is repeated three times (vv. 23-24, and 26) and is to be supplied mentally in one additional instance (after "ask" in v. 24). Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive" (vv. 23-24). And again, "In that day you will ask in my name" (v. 26).

What does it mean to approach the Father in the name of Christ? It means several things, a number of which were suggested earlier in our study of John 14:13-14. In the first place, it means *to come to God as one who is identified with Jesus Christ by faith,* that is, to come as a saved person. When we speak of the name of Jesus we do not mean just a mere human name, as if the name 'Jesus" is all we are talking about and as if it were no different than any other name. Jesus' full name is "the Lord Jesus Christ." And this means "Jehovah, the Savior, God's Anointed." "Lord" is the English translation of either of two Hebrew words: "Jehovah," the great Old Testament name for God, or "Adonai," which also refers to him. So to speak of "the *Lord* Jesus Christ" is to speak of One who is entirely divine, the incarnate God. We receive an impression of the significance of this title when we remember that the early Christians would not affirm the lordship of Caesar (*Kyrios Kaisar*) because it meant ascribing a divinity to the emperor that belonged to Christ alone.

The next part of the name, "Jesus," is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Jehoshua, meaning
"Jehovah is salvation." When the angel announced Christ's name to Joseph before his birth, Joseph was told, "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21).

"Christ," the last part of the name, is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *mashiach* ("Messiah"), both of which literally mean "anointed." It refers to One who is anointed by God to perform the work of redemption.

When we put these together we see that to come to the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is to come to God believing (1) that Jesus is fully divine, the unique Son of God, and (2) that he performed the full work of saving people by his death and resurrection, which he was anointed by God to do. Since this is the minimum definition of what it means to be a Christian, this is the equivalent of saying that prayer is for Christians only. It is a family privilege. God does not promise to hear the prayer of anyone who comes to him in any way but through faith in the person and work of his unique and beloved Son.

Second, praying in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ means *praying on the basis of his merit* and not on the basis of any merit of our own. The illustration of drawing money out of a bank is perfect in this connection because it involves a person's name. If I go to a bank with a check that I have signed and attempt to draw the stipulated amount of money from the bank, I am asking in my own name. If I have an account sufficiently large to cover the amount requested, the check will be cashed. If I do not have an account or if I have insufficient funds, it will not be cashed. But if, on the other hand, I go to a bank with another person's name signed to the check and if he has great resources on deposit, then it does not matter whether I have an account or not. The check is honored because of his name and his deposits.

That is what it means to come to God on the merit of Christ. Torrey, who uses this illustration in the book from which I quoted earlier, concludes, "So it is when I go to the bank of heaven, when I go to God in prayer. I have nothing deposited there, I have absolutely no credit there, and if I go in my own name I will get absolutely nothing; but Jesus Christ has unlimited credit in heaven, and he has granted to me the privilege of going to the bank with his name on my checks, and when I thus go, my prayers will be honored to any extent."

There is one more thing that praying in the name of Christ means. It means *praying in line with Christ's character and objectives,* that is, praying as he would under identical circumstances. Stedman writes on this point, 'To ask in anyone's name means to ask as though you were

that person. This means we are to ask for what Jesus would want, what he is after, and not for our own desires."

Can we really know what Christ is after? Can we know his will? Yes, we can. First, by means of his Word, and second, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit who interprets that Word to us and correctly guides our petitions.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of knowing and studying the Bible if we are to know the will of God. Nothing can ever be allowed to replace it. Occasionally, very occasionally, God reveals his will to us by extraordinary means, as he did to Moses at the burning bush or to Gideon by means of his fleece or to David by the voice of a prophet. But these are unusual means. The normal way of knowing the will of God is by what God has revealed of his purposes and character in the Bible and by the work of his Holy Spirit who takes what is written there and brings its meaning and contemporary force home to our hearts and consciences. Paul speaks of this latter part of the Spirit's ministry in prayer in its Godward aspect in Romans 8:26-27, saying, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know that we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

There are times when we do not know the will of God, and when that is the case we must pray cautiously allowing the Holy Spirit to interpret our prayers aright. But when we know God's will, as we do wherever it is revealed in Scripture, then we may pray confidently in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and know that we shall receive the petitions that we have requested of him.

A New Prayer Promise

The fourth and final element of these verses is the new promise they give regarding prayer. It is in two parts. First, there is the promise that God will give spiritual understanding to those who ask him. This is the

point of verse 25, which on the surface seems to break up the main thought of the passage. In verse 25 Jesus says, "Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father." We read that verse, and we think that suddenly the theme of the discourse has shifted; first, Jesus was talking about prayer, now he is talking about the nature of his teaching. But this is not a change. It is rather that Jesus was recognizing as he spoke that the disciples were not really understanding his teaching and that much of what he said was therefore a "dark saying" to them. "But this will not last forever," he says, "for one of the things you may ask for in prayer is understanding. If you ask, you will receive it." Do you and I lack understanding? Does the Bible at times seem a closed book to us? Are certain sayings of Christ or certain doctrines "hard"? If so, we have this promise that, if we ask, we will receive understanding. Jesus has said that he will show us "plainly about [the] Father."

Then, too, the promise of this passage concerns joy, for, says Jesus, "Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete" (v. 24). How does prayer promote joy? One way is that when we get what we ask this naturally satisfies us and makes us conscious of the favor of God toward us. But this is only part of the story. The other part is that prayer makes God himself real so that, as we pray and receive what we asked for, God is actually there dispensing the gift and meeting with us on the personal level.

I spoke to a woman who had cancer and knew at the point at which I talked with her that she did not have long to live. We talked about Christ and heaven and about God's purposes in suffering, and after we did we prayed together. I prayed fervently and specifically, but she prayed much better. In her prayer she quietly thanked God for his special and very vivid presence with her in these days, citing several examples, and she expressed her joy in him. It was evident as she prayed that God's presence with her was real and that she rejoiced in him in a way that clearly overshadowed her concern about the cancer.

It is a joy to stand in God's presence in the name of Jesus and make and receive requests of him. Do you know that joy? If not, you must take time actually to come into the presence of God and learn to pray. If you need help, he will help you. He will help you because he loves you and wants to be known by you, as Jesus indicates (v. 27).

Chapter 203.
Great Origin, Great Destiny

John 16:28-30

Some time ago in Toronto, Canada, I was talking with a young man about the various errors in theology, and I pointed out that most often heresy results from emphasizing one part of biblical truth at the expense of other parts, as a result of which even that one part is distorted. "That is true of the Trinity," he said. I agreed, for at this point error consists in emphasizing the unity of God at the expense of the diversity of persons or emphasizing the diversity at the expense of the unity. The first heresy is unitarianism. The second is polytheism or Arianism. As our conversation went on we pointed out that the same thing is true of the doctrine of Christ's person. Some overemphasize the deity, others the humanity. The true position is that Christ is both God and man in one person.

In thinking about the difficulty theologians have in keeping Christian doctrines straight and in balance, it is always somewhat of a surprise and relief to discover that the difficulty is never apparent in the Bible. The doctrines are there. God is both three and one. Christ is both God and man. But these truths are never stated in a labored or highly technical form. Instead, they seem to flow from the narrative or doctrinal sections of the books as easily as any other statement.

We have an example of this in the section of the Gospel of John now before us. It is toward the end of the final discourses, which close with chapter 16. The Lord is speaking, of course; and he says, "I came from

the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father" (v. 28). This statement concerning his true nature, his heavenly origin, and his heavenly destiny, is profound but, at the same time, so simple that the disciples listening to him were led to exclaim, "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God" (vv. 29-30). Beyond doubt, the disciples did not understand all that Christ was saying, but they were impressed that he knew their questions even before they asked them and could answer them simply. We should also be impressed as we begin to see all that is involved in Christ's statement.

I see four parts to verse 28. First, there is the doctrine of his heavenly origin; it involves Christ's preexistence and his full divinity. Second, there is the doctrine of the Incarnation, voluntarily assumed. Third, there is his voluntary return to God by way of crucifixion, burial, resurrection and ascension. Fourth, there is the matter of his heavenly destiny.

A Heavenly Origin

The first part of Christ's statement deals with his heavenly origin, for Jesus said, "I came from the Father." This, interestingly enough, is the main part of what the disciples understood, for their response was, "This makes us believe that you *came from God*" (v. 30).

What did they understand Christ to be saying? They undoubtedly understood Jesus to mean that he was the Messiah, for this was a common way of talking about the Messiah's coming into the world. Nicodemus said, when he encountered Jesus, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (John 3:2). The people who witnessed the miracles of the multiplication of the loaves and fish in Galilee exclaimed, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14). That they were speaking of the Messiah in this sentence is proved by the fact that they then wanted to

make him king, which we read about in the next verse. Similarly, Martha confessed, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (John 11:27). At the least, then, this sentence indicates that Jesus was the one sent into the world by God for the work of redemption.

But it also means more than this, as Martha's additional phrase, "the Son of God," indicates. For it is not just that Jesus was a special servant of God's but rather that in addition to this he was with God from all eternity and was himself God. I do not know if the disciples understood this entirely, but it is certainly Christ's teaching, as other statements show.

For example, in reference to his heavenly existence before the incarnation, Jesus told the Jews, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58). His hearers understood this to be blasphemy because they immediately took up stones to kill him. On another occasion Jesus said, "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man" (John 3:13). He said, "What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before?" (John 6:62). He said,
"I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38). Even more impressive than these statements is that great assertion from the seventeenth chapter: "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (vv. 4-5).

Here are claims to both preexistence and deity, and they are so frequent throughout the public and private teaching of Christ that we can truthfully say that if we do not know this about him, we can in truth know nothing. Jesus claimed to be God and to have come forth from God. Is it true? Or was it false and therefore devilish teaching? Alexander Maclaren saw the issue clearly over a generation ago and expressed it as follows: 'The meekest, lowliest, and most sane and wise of religious teachers made deliberately over and over again this claim, which is either absolutely true, and lifts him into the region of the Deity,

or else is fatal to his pretensions to be either meek or modest, or wise or sane, or a religious teacher to whom it is worth our while to listen."

This claim to deity is simple but stupendous. There can be no honest assessment of Christ that does not result in committing ourselves either to the truthfulness or falseness of those statements.

The Incarnation

The second part of verse 28 is an expression of the truth known as the incarnation, for Jesus said, "And [I] entered the world." There are several interesting aspects to this sentence. First, Jesus speaks of having "come" and "entered" rather than of having been "sent." It is true that Christ also was sent. Elsewhere he speaks of "the Father who sent me" (John 12:49). But this is not the point Jesus is emphasizing here. The point he is emphasizing is the voluntary nature of his incarnation. In other words, he did not have to be born. He was born because he wanted to be. This too is unique, because no one else can say that.

But this raises an even bigger question, for if Jesus chose to be born, if he assumed our human nature voluntarily, we immediately want to ask why he did this. *Cur Deus Homo*? Why did the eternal Son of God become man? There are two main answers. First, he became man in order to be our Savior, in order to die in our place and thereby pay the penalty of our sins so that we might be saved from the penalty and power of sin for heaven. This is the point of that passage from Hebrews from which I quoted earlier. I quoted the verse, "I have come to do your will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). But that verse is prefaced by others that speak of the way in which the sacrifice of Christ perfected the ineffectual sacrifices of animals under the Jewish sacrificial system: "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased" (vv. 4-6). The passage says further on, "He sets aside the first [sacrifice] to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (vv. 9-10).

Once, when Donald Grey Barnhouse was talking with some students about the atonement, he used the illustration of a judge who saw his son come before him, accused of reckless driving. The charge was clearly proven, and the judge fined the young man the full amount permitted under the law. Then the judge adjourned the court, stepped down from the bench, and paid his son's fine. A girl who had been listening very intently objected, "But God cannot get down off the bench!"

Barnhouse's answer was, 'You have given me one of the best illustrations of the incarnation that I will ever have. For Jesus Christ was no more or less than God, come down off the bench to pay the fine which he had imposed upon us."

There is a second reason why the Son of God became man, and it is this second answer that the Gospel most emphasizes. It is that Jesus came into the world to reveal God.

We see this clearly simply by examining the occasions on which Jesus speaks of his having "come" into the world or of his having been "sent" into the world by God. Here is a scattering of such sentences just as one is likely to find them by reading quickly through the Gospel. "I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony" (3:11). "The one who comes from above is above all... He testifies to what he has seen and heard... The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit" (3:31-34). "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me" (7:16). "I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence" (8:38). "As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God" (8:40). "I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. ... Whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say" (12:49-50). 'These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me" (14:24). In the great prayer of John 17, Jesus addresses the Father directly saying, "I

gave them the words you gave me" (v. 8) and "I have given them your word" (v. 14).

The point of this is that Jesus has firsthand information about God the Father and that he should therefore be trusted and believed when he speaks of spiritual things.

A Voluntary Departure

The third part of verse 28 deals with Christ's voluntary departure from this world; for he says, "Now I am leaving the world." This throws a great deal of light on the nature of his crucifixion, because if we take it seriously, it means that the crucifixion was not something thrust upon Jesus against his will (as it might well have been were we in his place) but rather that to which his entire ministry was directed and which he joyfully embraced. It was he who said, "I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and to take it up again" (John 10:17-18).

We hear much about love today, and God is assumed to be love. But it is only at the cross of Christ, in his voluntary death for us, that we learn that God truly is love. Love is seen at the cross. For this reason there is hardly a verse in the Bible which speaks of God's love that does not in the same context, often within the very verse itself, speak of Christ's voluntary sacrifice. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Or, Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." First John 4:10 declares, 'This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." **Christ's Destiny**

The final section of verse 28 deals with Christ's heavenly destiny: "And [I am] going back to the Father." What is the significance for us that Jesus has returned to the Father, having come to this earth and having

died for our salvation? There are several answers. First, it shows us that the work of redemption is completed and that we can be confident as we come to God on the basis of Christ's finished work. If the work was not done, Christ should still be here completing it. But it is done. Hence, he has returned to heaven, where he has sat down at the Father's right hand. The author of Hebrews discusses this in the same passage referred to earlier, for those verses go on to say, "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (Heb. 10:12-14).

Second, the fact that Christ has returned to heaven shows us that he is now in a place where he is able to impart all spiritual gifts and blessings to us as he sees we have need of them. The first of these gifts was the Holy Spirit, for Jesus said, "It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). There are other gifts also. Thus, we read in Ephesians, "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: 'When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men'" (Eph. 4:7-8; cf. Ps. 68:18).

Third, Christ's present position at the right hand of the Father is one from which he intercedes for his own. Paul speaks of it in Romans saying that Christ "intercedes for us" (Rom. 8:34). The author of Hebrews says, "Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Heb. 7:25). Thus we sing,

> Arise, my soul, arise,
> Shake off thy guilty fears:
> The bleeding Sacrifice In my behalf appears:
> Before the Throne my Surety stands, My name

is written on his hands.

It is Jesus' present position in heaven that makes us confident both of salvation and in our approach to God in our prayer and worship.

Finally, Christ's present position in heaven is a token that he is coming to earth again, this time in great power and glory and with his holy angels. Jesus is coming. This is as sure as the fact that he has come once to die for our salvation. Will you be ready to meet him? Will you greet him as your Savior, or will you have to greet him as one whose love you have spurned, whose sacrifice you have repudiated?

You say that you believe in Christ as a great man, a great teacher. Good! That is better than nothing. But it is not enough to save you. Why stop there? Why stop with Jesus the man? Why not have the whole Christ as he is here presented? Maclaren has well written, 'These four facts— the dwelling in the Father; the voluntary coming to earth; the voluntary leaving earth; and, again, the dwelling with the Father—are the walls of the strong fortress into which we may flee and be safe. With them it 'stands four square to every wind that blows.' Strike away one of them, and it totters into ruin. Make the whole Christ your Christ; for nothing less than the whole Christ, 'conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,... crucified, dead, and buried,... ascended into Heaven, and sitting at the right hand of God,' is strong enough to help your infirmities, vast enough to satisfy your desires, loving enough to love you as you need, or able to deliver you from your sins, and to lift you to the glories of his own Throne."

That is precisely the case. May you find that One and come fully to trust him for your own soul's good and the praise of the glory of his grace.

Chapter 204.
Christ's Disciples Scattered

John 16:31-33

There are two reasons why the Lord Jesus Christ was not as impressed by his disciples' professions of faith as they themselves were. First, their faith had been a long time coming. Second, it was about to evaporate. In the verses that close the sixteenth chapter of John, Jesus had been answering the questions of the disciples without their having actually asked them, and this had led them to exclaim, "Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God" (v. 30). This claim was honest, but really quite pretentious. They claimed to believe. They said that they were sure in their belief, but they were actually weak in commitment. Thus, instead of being impressed with his disciples' faith, Jesus goes on to foretell their confusion and scattering at the time of his crucifixion.

This whole exchange should be a lesson for Christian people, for we are often quite confident in our faith, and yet are not as strong as we imagine ourselves to be. We say, "Now I believe; now I am sure." But in a short while we find ourselves doubting the very thing we affirmed.

A Realistic Appraisal

A number of years ago my first assistant at Tenth Presbyterian Church told me something that he had remembered from his early childhood. He had been helping his father put some things on the dining-room table, and he had asked to carry something that his father judged to be too heavy for him. He argued with his father, making many protestations. "Please, Father, I know I can carry it. I am sure I can." At last his father let him try. He started out confidently and carefully, but suddenly he dropped the container and the liquid spilled. He told me that he learned one of the great lessons of his life that day as he stood staring down at the spilled mess and the broken container. He felt absolutely chagrined; he had been so sure of himself. But his father had been right after all, and he was wrong.

Everyone has had such experiences, and it is these that will help us understand the profession of the disciples and their feelings as Jesus

gently revealed the future to them. They were so sure of their faith. But in a short while—in fact, within hours—their faith would be gone.

Notice three things that Jesus prophesied concerning them. First, he revealed that they would soon be *scattered.* Now they were together, and, as is often the case, there was encouragement in numbers. And, of course, there was Jesus. If they had known the song, they might well have sung, "Give me ten men who are stouthearted men, and I'll soon give you ten thousand more." But they did not really know themselves. So before long, much to their chagrin, they would be scattered. Most scampered back over the Mount of Olives toward Bethany at the time of Christ's arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter followed the arresting party back into Jerusalem, but afar off. After the crucifixion Cleopas and Mary returned to Emmaus, and the others were undoubtedly making plans for their own departure.

Second, Jesus foretold their *confusion.* This is involved in his questions about their belief, for when he exclaims, "You believe *at last*!" it is as much as to say that the time was coming when they would no longer believe and all would be confusion. Now they were sure that he was the Messiah, come forth from God. But how could they be sure of that following the harsh reality of Christ's crucifixion? Like the Emmaus disciples they would all be saying, "But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21).

Third, Jesus revealed that they would soon be *isolated,* for each would be scattered "to his own." When we read that phrase the first time we find ourselves asking, "Scattered to his own what? To his own house? City? Friends?" Jesus is saying that each would be scattered to his own little world and that each would be isolated in it. With the center gone, there would no longer be any cohesion to the little itinerant band. It is as if the devil, the disrupter, would have his way and that this heroic attempt to bind the sinful and scattered race of Adam into that glorious new unity of the church would come to ruin.

Well, what of it? Surely that is not our case, now that we have understood the meaning of the cross and stand on this side of Christ's

resurrection! Is that right? Are we never scattered? Never confused? Never isolated? Of course, we are! We are scattered—sometimes by persecution, sometimes by schism within the denominations, sometimes merely by our suspicion of other Christians. We are confused, for even believers do not always have a sure answer to give to those who ask them a reason of the hope within. Circumstances, sickness, and other troubles rattle us. We are isolated, for Christians are often terribly alone. I have had Christians write to me with problems because of having heard me over the *Bible Study Hour,* and they have said, "I have no one to turn to; there is no other person with whom I can share my problems."

I want you to notice that in all of these respects—scattered, confused, isolated—Jesus is the exact opposite of the disciples. They scattered at the time of his arrest, but Jesus stood firm. He stood firm even to the point of death, as a result of which, after his resurrection, he became a magnetic point about which they regathered. They were confused, but he was strong in faith, as a result of which they recovered faith from him. They were isolated. But he, even though he was abandoned by them, could say, "But I am not alone, because the Father is with me." They emerged from their isolation when he came to them again following the resurrection.

I am glad that the Lord accepts weak, stammering, even ignorant faith. If he did not, what would become of us? Who could be saved? But having said that, let us not imagine that our faith or perception is the crucial thing, for "weak, stammering and ignorant" is an accurate description of it. Our strength is not in our faith but in him who is the object of it. It is in Jesus.

Christ's Legacy

The second lesson of these verses is Christ's parting legacy to his disciples. He had gently exposed the weakness of their supposedly strong faith. But not wishing to leave them with the exposure, he immediately goes on to talk of that which really is strong and which will endure even in tribulations. He talks about peace, his peace. It is

the same peace he had spoken of in the fourteenth chapter: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled" (14:27). It was announced of Christ at his birth that he had come to bring peace—"peace on earth, good will toward men." This he did, and he left it behind at his departure.

In 1874 a French steamer called the *Ville du Havre* was on a homeward voyage from America when a collision with a sailing vessel took place. The damage to the steamer was considerable, and as a result it sank quickly with the loss of nearly all who had been on board. One passenger, Mrs. Horatio G. Spafford, the wife of a lawyer in Chicago, had been en route to Europe with her four children. On being informed that the ship was sinking she knelt with her children and prayed that they might be saved or, if not, that they might be willing to die, if that was God's will. When the ship went down, the children were all lost. Mrs. Spafford was rescued by a sailor who had been rowing over the spot where the ship had sunk and found her floating in the water. Ten days later, when she reached Cardiff, she sent her husband the message: "Saved alone." This was a great blow, a sadness hardly comprehensible to anyone who has not lost a child. But though a great shock, it did not destroy the peace that either of the parents, who were both Christians, had from Jesus. Spafford wrote as a testimony to the grace of God in his experience:

When peace, like a river,
attendeth my way, When
sorrows like sea-billows roll—
Whatever my lot, thou hast
taught me to say, It is well,
it is well with my soul.
Though Satan should buffet, though
trials should come, Let this blest
assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my
helpless estate, And hath shed

his own blood for my soul.

This is the meaning of the Christian's peace. It is not an absence of conflict or any other kind of trial or disappointment. Rather it is contentment and trust in God in spite of such circumstances.

Two Conditions

But it is not automatic. That is, it is not ours regardless of whether or not we meet Christ's conditions for entering into this inheritance. The conditions he lays down in this passage are two.

First, the peace Christ gives is for those who are "in him." This could mean simply that peace is for Christians, for when we become Christians God places us in Christ so that we may properly be said to have died and risen with him and to be sitting now with him in heaven. But this is probably not what Christ is talking about here. We must remember in interpreting this verse that the discourses in which they occur have been full of admonitions to "believe on" Christ and, more importantly, to "remain in" him. This is not the kind of being "in" Christ that corresponds with being saved but rather a conscious dependence on him and staying close to him that is the prerequisite to joy and fruitfulness in the Christian life. It is this that Christ has in mind as he closes these discourses. Jesus gives peace. But the gift of peace is appropriated only by those who depend on him, trust him, and remain close to him in their living of the Christian life.

Moreover, this interpretation of being "in" Christ is reinforced by the second of the two conditions: that the words of Christ might be in his followers. Jesus indicates this when he says, "*I have told you these things*, so that in me you may have peace" (v. 33). What things are these? They are the doctrines of this section of John's Gospel. We previewed these at the beginning of our study of this section.

First, there is the fact of Christ's love for the disciples. Chapter 13 begins with this truth: "It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed

them the full extent of his love" (v. 1). The chapter that is introduced by that verse contains a great demonstration of the love of Christ for his own, the foot washing, which is at the same time both a true demonstration of Christ's condescending love and an illustration of his humbling of himself in order to be able to die on the cross. Throughout the discourses there is repeated evidence of Christ's concern for his own. He is concerned to instruct them, warn them, and prepare them for his departure.

Second, Jesus spoke about heaven, saying that he was going to prepare a place for his own in heaven and that, if he was going, he would return and take them to himself so that where he was there they would be also (14:2-3). What was new in this teaching was not the mere fact of heaven, but rather that Jesus had an interest in it and would guarantee a personalized place in heaven for his followers.

Third, Jesus had spoken about the coming of the Holy Spirit. This was a tremendously new thing, for although the Old Testament had much to say about the Spirit of God, and although several of the Old Testament prophecies had spoken of a day when the Holy Spirit should be poured forth in power, no one had been associating that with Christ's ministry or gifts. Now the disciples were told that Christ would himself send the Spirit and that he would come to be in them and work through them. According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit would comfort the disciples. He would also perform a ministry toward the world, for he would convict the world "of sin, righteousness and judgment" (16:8).

Fourth, Jesus spoke of a work that the disciples were to perform and for which he was leaving them in the world. He spoke of it in different ways. In the fourteenth chapter he spoke of it in comparison with his own work, saying that it would be even greater: "Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (v. 12). In the fifteenth chapter he spoke of it in terms of his commissioning of them to fruitful service: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (v. 16). Having work to do in this world, their lives would be meaningful.

Fifth, the Lord spoke about prayer, giving us some of the most exciting promises in the Bible concerning it. "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it" (14:13-14). "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you" (15:7). "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete" (16:24). The Lord also told them that he would pray for them. In the seventeenth chapter, we have a magnificent example of just such intercession.

Finally, even as Jesus reminds the disciples of what he has already taught, he adds another teaching: "But take heart! I have overcome the world" (16:33).

Christus Victor

This is the point at which we should end—the point of Christ's victory. He overcame the world in three areas: in his life, in his death, and in his resurrection. He overcame it in life because, in spite of abundant griefs and temptations, he pursued the course God had set before him without deviation, sin, or error. He said of Satan, "The prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me" (John 14:30). He overcame the world in death because his death was the price of sin and thus broke sin's hold upon us. He overcame the world in his resurrection because by his resurrection he began his return to the throne of heaven from which he now rules the church and from which he will one day come again to put down all authority and power.

"I have overcome the world." These words were spoken within the shadow of Golgotha, at the very foot of the cross. They were spoken on the verge of what surely seemed a defeat. But they were true then. And if they were true then, it is even more abundantly demonstrated that they are true now. Do you believe them? Is Christ the victor? If you do and if he is, then stand with him in his victory. Possess that peace that he dispenses, and in your turn also overcome the world. Does the world deride Christ's gospel? So much the worse for the world. Do

circumstances press us down? He has overcome circumstances. Stand with him then. He is the King. He is God over all, whose name is blessed forever.

Chapter 205.
The Real Lord's Prayer

John 17:1-5

In several places in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and other writings, John Calvin, the great reformer and theologian, speaks of God's revelation of himself to us in the Bible as baby talk, the kind of speech used by a loving mother communicating with an infant child. What Calvin means by this is that any communication to us by God must be in the simplest and most rudimentary language from God's point of view. His thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are not our ways. Consequently, God must condescend to speak to us in baby talk if we are to understand him. If the Scriptures are to be of any use to us, they must be a rudimentary revelation.

When we think along these lines, however, it is natural to speculate on what that true and deep communication that exists between the members of the Godhead might be by contrast. It is granted that God must talk baby talk to us, but how profound, deep, and unfathomable must be that talk between the Father and Son and between both of them and the Holy Spirit! Are we right in this speculation? In one sense, we obviously are. Still, the section of the Gospel of John to which we come now is an immediate and abrupt check on any of our thoughts along these lines. For, while it is the purest and most extensive example in all the Bible of a direct, verbalized communication between two members of the Godhead, nevertheless it is expressed in the most comprehensible phrasings, syntaxes, and words.

Compare it with Luke's prose, for example. Luke begins the Book of Acts with beautiful Greek style: "In my former book, Theophilus, I

wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive" (1:1-3). It goes on in that vein. But listen to John 17. "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (vv. 1-3). The prayer goes on: "I pray for them. I am not praying for the world.... All I have is yours, and all you have is mine.... Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.... Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world" (vv. 9-10, 17, 24).

This prayer contains the simplest of sentences, though the ideas are profound. It is proof that the difficulty we have in understanding God's truth is not in the complexity of the truth itself or in the language with which it is conveyed (as if it were logarithms or German philosophy) but in our own ignorance, sin, and spiritual lethargy.

A Priestly Prayer

What a wonderful prayer this is! It has three parts: Christ's prayer for himself (vv. 1-5), his prayer for his disciples (vv. 6-19), and his prayer for all who should follow them in faith in the coming centuries (vv. 20-26). The shortest part is Christ's prayer for his own interests. By contrast, he prays at length both for his disciples and for ourselves as members of his mystical body. The prayer has five main petitions, one for himself and four for us. The second and third parts enumerate six distinctive marks of the church, each of which we will eventually study separately: joy, holiness, truth, mission, unity, and love.

A study of these verses soon shows that this is the true Lord's Prayer. The prayer that begins, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name..." (Matt. 6:9-13), should more accurately be termed The

Disciples' Prayer. The one in John 17 is Jesus' prayer. It has properly been designated his High Priestly Prayer, for he intercedes for us here as our High Priest before his Father's throne.

Luther said of this prayer, "This is truly, beyond measure, a warm and hearty prayer. He opens the depths of His heart, both in reference to us and to His Father, and He pours them all out. It sounds so honest, so simple; it is so deep, so rich, so wide, no one can fathom it." Melanchthon, Luther's friend and colleague, wrote, "There is no voice which has ever been heard, either in heaven or in earth, more exalted, more holy, more fruitful, more sublime, than the prayer offered up by the Son to God Himself." The Scottish Reformer, John Knox, had this prayer read to him every day during his final sickness, and in the closing moments of his life he testified that these verses continued to be a great comfort and a source of strength for his conflict.

This prayer should be to us something of what the burning bush was to Moses, for here we hear God speaking, and we should put off our shoes and bow humbly, being about to tread on the most hallowed ground.

The First Petition

We turn now to the first of Christ's petitions. It is found in verses 1 and 5. It is the prayer that the Father would "glorify" Jesus, as a result of which Jesus would in turn "glorify" the Father. The verses read, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.... And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."

In understanding this petition we are, however, immediately confronted with a problem, for few words in the distinct biblical vocabulary are less understood than the word "glory." What is more, even a perfectly correct definition—once we have found it—does not always do justice to the passage under consideration. This passage is itself a perfect illustration of this second difficulty, for in the first five verses we are told four apparently conflicting things about Christ's glory. First, Jesus

possessed a certain glory with God before the incarnation. Second, this glory was God's glory. Third, Jesus did not possess this glory during the years of his incarnation; he here prays that this original glory might be restored to him. And yet, at the same time and fourthly, there is a sense in which he did possess this glory while on earth, for he revealed it to others by finishing the work God had given him to do. This latter sense is involved in John 2:11, to give just one additional example; for we are told there that the changing of water into wine at Cana was the beginning of those miracles in which Jesus "revealed his glory" and as a result of which his disciples "believed on him."

How can this be? How can the Lord have possessed God's glory, have renounced it, and yet have possessed it even in the period of the renunciation? And what does the phrase "the glory of God" mean anyhow?

The resolution of this problem and the only sufficient basis on which we will ever understand Christ's petition lies in an understanding of the way in which the idea of "glory" was used in ancient Greek and Hebrew literature. In the Greek language the word for glory is *doxa*, which in turn is based upon the ancient verb *dokeo*. In the early days the verb meant "to seem," "to appear," or "to have an opinion." This meaning is apparent in the idiomatic expression *dokei moi*, which means, "it seems good to me." It occurs in the New Testament most clearly in Galatians 2 in which Paul speaks of the Jerusalem apostles as those who "seemed to be leaders" (v. 2), "seemed to be important" (v. 6), and were "reputed to be pillars" (v. 9). It was an opinion that Paul himself apparently did not fully embrace. The noun correspondingly meant an "opinion" or, more precisely, "what one thinks." This meaning is preserved in our English words "orthodox," "heterodox," and "paradox," which mean, roughly, "a straight (or right) opinion," "a different (or other) opinion" and "a contrary (or conflicting) opinion." This early history of the words is documented in the great theological Greek dictionary edited by Gerhard Kittel, from which these details are taken.

Some time after this early history of the words, the noun (*doxa* or "glory") began a development of its own that soon took it from its

original meaning. In the early stage it had meant an "opinion," any opinion. But as time went on it came to mean, first, a "good opinion" (as opposed to just any opinion) and, then, "that which merits a good opinion." During these stages the word could correctly have been translated as "praise," "honor," "good standing," "reputation," or "renown." When used of a king or of a divine being, it obviously meant the ultimate in praise or renown, as when we read: "Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.... The LORD Almighty—he is the King of glory" (Ps. 24:8, 10).

The quotation from Psalm 24 introduces us to another feature of the history of the word, however, for it begins to show the result of the Bible's applying the word to God. The glory of God was obviously linked to his attributes, for he could be called the King of glory because he was perfect in all his attributes—love, truth, holiness, grace, power, knowledge, immutability, and so forth—and was therefore truly glorious. Incidentally, this also exemplifies the meaning of the word orthodox, because the person who has orthodox beliefs is the one able to form a correct, or proper, opinion of God's attributes. In this way, God's glory consists of his intrinsic worth, or character, to use a human term. Thus, all that can be properly known of God is an expression of his glory.

At this point we can understand one use of the word glory in Christ's petition, for when he says, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (v. 4), he is saying that, by his ministry, he had revealed the essential characteristics of the Father. When the disciples beheld his glory, as in 2:11, they actually beheld his character, which was the character of God. It is one way of saying that, if we have seen Jesus, we have seen the Father.

Shekinah Glory

This only explains one use of the word, however. It explains the glory that Jesus obviously retained during the years of his earthly ministry. But what of that glory that he had with the Father before the incarnation, which he renounced and which he prayed might be

restored? If this glory refers to God's essential character, it would mean that Jesus was less than God during the days of his ministry, and this is not right. What does the word mean in these more exalted references?

The answer to this question is found in the recognition that there is another, entirely different meaning of the word "glory," which had its origin in Hebrew rather than Greek thought, and which entered the Greek language later only as a result of contacts between Greek and Hebrew culture. Although the beginnings of these contacts are not known, it seems that the major factor was the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek about one hundred years before Christ.
The translation is known as the Septuagint. Later writers, such as the Jewish philosopher Philo (born c. 20-10 B.C.) and Flavius Josephus (born c. A.D. 37), employ the word with both meanings.

In Jewish thought any outward manifestation of God's presence was believed to involve a display of light, radiance, or glory so brilliant that no man could approach it. This idea is involved in the phrase "the light of [his] face" (Ps. 4:6; 44:3). It is in Psalm 104:1-2, "O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty. He wraps himself in light as with a garment." We have a graphic example in the case of Moses whose face glowed with a transferred light after he had been with God on Mount Sinai, so much so that the people asked that he cover his face with a veil that they might be shielded from the radiance (Exod. 34:29-35; 2 Cor. 3:1315). Light was also associated with the cloud of glory that overshadowed the wilderness tabernacle during the years of Israel's wandering and that later filled Solomon's great temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:10-11). This idea is so important that it is found throughout the Old Testament. In post Old Testament times, in the Targums and other Jewish writings, a new word, *Shekinah*, more perfectly embodied it.

We now have enough knowledge of the word "glory" to understand Christ's first petition. Before his incarnation Jesus had possessed the glory of God in both these senses. He possessed the fullness of God's attributes and character in the inward sense; he also possessed the fullness of God's outward, visible glory. In the Incarnation Jesus laid the

second of these aside; for, if he had not, we would not have been able to approach him. Nevertheless, he retained God's glory in the first sense and indeed disclosed it to his disciples, who received it by faith. Now at the end of his earthly ministry, on the verge of his crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, he prays that he might again enter into this visible glory.

Now Jesus has been exalted. He has been given that glory. Stephen saw it at the time of his martyrdom; so also did John (he wrote about it in the Book of Revelation) and perhaps Paul as well. This fact should be a great encouragement for believers, for it points to the kingly rule of Christ who now rules his church in righteousness and preserves his people.

Christ Our Glory

There is one further thought. It is that we shall share in Christ's glory. In a sense, we share in it now, for, to the degree that we embody Christ's character, we possess his glory in the first of its two important senses. Is not this what Jesus means when he goes on to say, "Glory has come to me through them" (v. 10)? Or again, "I have given them the glory that you gave me" (v. 22)? Moreover, we shall even see Christ's visible, outward glory one day, for Jesus goes on to pray concerning us and of that glory, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory" (v. 24).

What shall we conclude then? If we shall one day behold Christ's glory and if we are to be filled with it now, let us strive to glorify him and show forth his glory. And let us pray that God will do that in us, for it is obviously not something of which we in ourselves are capable.

But notice! When Jesus prayed that he might be glorified and that God would therefore be glorified in him, he buttressed his petition with reasons. They are instructive. I see five reasons behind Christ's request. First, that the hour had come (v. 1). This means that the hour of Christ's great work had come, the hour of his crucifixion and subsequent resurrection. To say that the hour had come meant that Jesus had been in the will of his Father throughout his life, that this had brought him to the hour of his most important work, and that he would be continuing in

that will until it was done. Second, he prays for his glorification because it would result in the glorification of the Father (v. 1). In other words, the prayer was not selfish but merely that which every intelligence in the universe should desire. Third, he says that God the Father had already given him authority to grant eternal life to each one who had been given to him (v. 2). His glorification followed naturally upon this. Fourth, Jesus argues that by virtue of his death he is the only way to life (v. 3). His glorification would therefore mean the salvation of his people. Finally, he speaks of his finished work (v. 4). The divine pattern is first self-denial, obedience, and suffering, after which the glory follows.

This should be our pattern also. We must seek to glorify Christ while we live by showing forth his character. But this will not happen in some mystical way. It will happen only as, by the grace of God, we walk in his will (as he directs), as we carry out whatever responsibility he has entrusted to us, as we point to Jesus as the only way of salvation, as we finish our work, and as we seek the glory of God in its fullness, rather than our own.

Chapter 206.
God's Gifts to Jesus

John 17:2

The second verse of the prayer recorded in John 17 gives a reason for Jesus' request that is found in the first verse (the request to be glorified by the Father). The reason is that glorification and the authority over all flesh already granted to him go together. As I read this verse, however, the part that strikes me most is its repetition of the verb "to give" or "grant." It occurs twice of the Father's gifts to Jesus: the gift of power [or authority] over all flesh, and the gift of a people. It occurs once of Christ's gift of eternal life to those whom God has given him. As we study this verse we will find that the three are connected, and will be

led into the very heart of the relationships of the Son to the Father and of both to us in salvation.

Gift of a People

I do not know if you have ever had difficulty finding an appropriate gift for someone, particularly for a person who apparently has everything, but I confess that I have. And sometimes it bothers me. I can imagine myself giving a bottle of shampoo to a man who wears a wig, though I did not know it, or giving a recording of the Bach *B Minor Mass* to a person who hates classical music. The fear of doing something inappropriate is what makes us hesitant so much at the counter when buying a present for someone just before Christmas.

I do not think, however, that God the Father had a problem when he was considering the first of these great gifts for his Son Jesus. For what could be more *appropriate* for God the Father to give the Son than a people who should be conformed to his own blessed image and be his brothers and sisters throughout eternity? A mansion would not be appropriate, for all the mansions of heaven already belong to Christ and are going to be prepared by him for those who are his own. A world such as this, even a galaxy of such worlds, is not appropriate, for Jesus shared in the making of the worlds that already exist, and he could make billions more at any time, if he so chose. Nothing that we can possibly imagine would be a more appropriate gift to that One who is himself the Lord of glory than a people of his own—a people who had been created in his image, who had fallen into sin, but who were now to be redeemed by Christ and called to him in faith by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As we read this and the other verses that speak along these lines, we find ourselves facing what the old Reformed theologians called a covenant between God the Father and God the Son, according to which God would give to Jesus in salvation that vast company for whom he was specifically to die.

Moreover, this was not only an appropriate gift for Jesus; it was a *satisfying* one as well, for it is often recorded of Christ that he took joy in or rejoiced over his people. One great example of this is in the Old Testament, in the Book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 53, that great chapter in which the suffering and death of Christ for his own is most clearly spelled out, it is said that the Lord should look upon the fruit of his suffering and be satisfied: "Though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied" (vv. 10-11). The satisfaction was in knowing that his death would secure our salvation.

The theme of Christ's satisfaction is also in the New Testament, as in Hebrews 12, to give just one example. We are told there to look to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, "the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame" (v. 2). In what was Christ's joy to be found? Clearly in the knowledge that by his death he would secure the salvation of all whom God had given him.

Do you think that the promise to Christ that a certain people, given to him by the Father and surely to be saved by his suffering, was also a *comfort* to Christ on the verge of his crucifixion? It must have been. Otherwise, why would the phrase "who you have given me" (twice with slight variations) appear seven times in verses 2, 6, 9, 11, 12, and 14?

We all find ourselves repeating an idea or phrase when we have been faced by something particularly trying or traumatic. Sometimes people facing a dreaded operation keep repeating, "It will all be over in just a few hours," or "I know it will turn out all right." When competing in sports, we sometimes repeat something we should recall in order to perform well: "Keep your chin down," "Keep your forearm stiff," "Remember to breathe deeply," or some such point of personal instruction. It was the same with Jesus. The cross was no easy task for him, particularly since, when he was made sin for us, it involved a real, though temporary, separation from the Father. In the Garden, on this same evening, he even prayed in agony that this cup be removed from

him, if such could be the Father's will. This was hard, but in his trial he received comfort in knowing that his suffering would result in the salvation of his people. Of these he had said earlier, "All that the Father gives me" (John 6:37). His death was to provide the objective and judicial basis upon which these who had already been given to him should come.

There is no greater gift, no more appropriate gift, no more satisfying gift for Jesus than this, the gift of the church to the One who would die for it. If you have believed on Christ as your Savior, you should know that you are one who was thus given to Jesus before the foundation of the world and about whom he was thinking and receiving comfort as he died.

Authority

The second of God's gifts to Jesus according to John 17:3 is power or, as the word *exousia* should better be translated, authority. The gift is authority over all flesh to do with as he will. It is a great authority, for it is on the basis of this authority that he can give eternal life to all whom God has given him.

There are several very important things about this authority. First, its scope. The text is speaking of this when it says, "For you granted him authority over *all* people." All means everyone, everyone who has ever lived or who will ever live. It means the rich as well as the poor, the supposedly sophisticated persons of our culture as well as the savage in the jungle, the strong as well as the weak, the intelligent as well as the not-so-intelligent. It means the other person. It means me. No one is expected from the scope of this universal authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.
Therefore he may do with them as he wishes. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Moreover, it is not just all men and women, past and future, who are subject to his authority. It is angels and demons, those in heaven and in hell as well. This truth is clearly taught in that great passage on Christ's

exaltation—Philippians 2:9-11. "Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Here three distinct categories of intelligent beings are mentioned: those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth. This refers to angels (whose natural dwelling place is with God), men and women (who dwell upon earth), and those fallen angels or demons (who were cast out of heaven at the time of their original rebellion and who will one day inhabit hell, which has been prepared for them). There are two different kinds of acknowledgment, of course. The holy angels and those who have been redeemed from among men and women will acknowledge Christ gladly. They will rejoice to confess him Lord. Others, the fallen angels and those who have not believed from among men and women, will not acknowledge him gladly. But they *will* acknowledge him, being forced to this by the sheer fact of his triumph. However the acknowledgment is made, either willingly or reluctantly and with hatred, the acknowledgment *will* be made, and the full scope of the authority and power of the Lord Jesus Christ will be vindicated.

It is wise for us to ask, not how we may escape that authority (for we cannot) but rather in what way that acknowledgement of his rule shall be made by us. Willingly and with joy? Or grudgingly and with hatred? If we do not come to believe in and love the Lord Jesus Christ here, we will not do it on that great day when all are called before him.

The second important thing to note about the authority of Christ portrayed in this verse is its depth, for it is not just that Jesus has been granted authority over all, important as that is, but also that He has been granted authority "over all flesh"(KJV). Flesh is the most recalcitrant thing in the universe.

In common English usage the word "flesh" refers almost exclusively to the fleshy parts of the body and is related to the "skin." Yet this is not what the word means in the Bible. To be sure, it can at times mean "skin." But generally it means the entire individual—composed of a

body, soul, and spirit—which since the fall is constantly motivated by a sinful nature. We see the first instance of this broader definition in the early chapters of Genesis when Adam says, after God has brought the first woman to him, "'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman," for she was taken out of man.' For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (2:23-24). This last phrase does not mean that the man and the woman were to be united sexually only, though that was an important part of their union, but rather that they were to be united on each level of their being—body, soul, and spirit—so that they would thereafter be what we might conceivably call one organism. The word "flesh," therefore, denotes the whole of man's being.

In this first case the word "flesh" is used in a favorable sense. But with the coming of the fall in the next chapter this initial and favorable usage changes. Now the word continues to refer to the whole of man's being, but a being that is sadly dominated by man's depraved sinful nature.

Let me give an illustration. We may think in terms of an airplane flying at 35,000 feet. The pilot is the soul. The fuselage is the flesh. The thrust of the engines is the spirit. In that form each part of the airplane is good and is functioning as the designer intended it to function. But if the engines stop, the entire plane is in trouble, for now the fuselage, which was an asset when the engines were running, becomes a liability and will soon draw the plane to destruction. To be fleshly in the biblical sense means, therefore, to be dominated by the body without the ongoing thrust of the spirit. Sometimes it is said that we are dominated by our "old man" or "old nature." Sometimes the Bible speaks of the deceitfulness of our heart.

Here are some texts. "Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5). "Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires" (Eph. 4:22). "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jer. 17:9). "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander,

arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'" (Mark 7:21-23). "Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8).

With this background we can appreciate something of the depth of the authority of Christ over all flesh, for the point of this word is not merely that Jesus has authority over all intelligent beings, though that is true, but also that he has authority even over that stubborn and rebellious nature that now so totally dominates men and women. I am glad that he does, for if he had not had that authority over me to turn me from my path of rebellion and quicken my dead spirit so that I might respond to him in faith, I would never have believed. I would be under condemnation and soon to perish in my sin. But in grace he turned me to himself, as he has countless others.

Universal and Specific

This leads to the third of the gifts mentioned in the text. We are told that Jesus has been given authority over all so that he might in a specific way give eternal life to as many as God has given him. The authority is universal. It cannot possibly be greater either in scope or in depth. Nevertheless, the exercise of that authority in the matter of salvation is specific, for it is shown in the giving of eternal life to those, and only those, whom God has given him.

This is the problem of the verse so far as natural, human thinking goes. We do not really doubt or question the statement that Jesus has authority over all—at least no Christian does—for this is what a Christian confesses when he calls Jesus Lord. But it is quite another matter to say that he gives eternal life selectively and that only to those who have already been given to him by the Father. How can this be? Is God partial? Is this really the way God operates in salvation?

We must be ready to say that we do not fully understand these things, particularly when we are asked the why of God's actions. Nevertheless, we must always say that this is the way God operates and that he is just in doing so, whatever our thoughts in the matter may be.

Jesus faced precisely these objections on more than one occasion during his ministry, and sometimes they were violently expressed. For example, on the occasion of his opening his ministry by a reading of the Book of Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth, he got into a discussion of the nature of God's electing grace, and the people who heard him were offended. Earlier he had pointed to himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2, and they were not particularly upset about that. In fact, we are told that they actually "were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips" (Luke 4:22). But then he explained that God does not always work where we expect him to or according to our standards of justice or propriety. He said, "I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian" (vv. 25-27). These verses illustrate God's authority over all so that he might show mercy on whom he will. And at this statement, not at the earlier one but at this, the people were "furious.... They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff (vv. 28-29).

Which is worse, the fact that we are dead in our trespasses and sins and unable to come to Christ unless Jesus first gives eternal life to us, or the fact that we naturally hate these truths when they are spoken to us? It is hard to say. But what is best is to say that God in his grace has given some to Christ and that Jesus has in turn given them his own life that they might be saved.

Are you such a person? I cannot say that you are or are not, apart from your response to Christ, and neither can you. But I can say that if you find stirrings of spiritual life within you so that you are becoming increasingly aware of your spiritual need and are finding Jesus to be the One who is attractive to you as the Savior, and if you are turning to him, then it is because these great gifts of God have already taken place

where you are concerned, and you are being brought inevitably to Jesus. God has given you to him. Jesus is drawing you. Come to him. Find him to be your Savior.

Chapter 207.
Knowing the True God

John 17:3

One of the things that has always interested me in my study of the Word of God is the number of ways in which one may speak of salvation. In fact, it has been more than interesting. It is important because it is often the case that Christians get locked into one particular way of talking about salvation and thus cannot change, even when the person to whom they are talking fails to understand their terminology. That needs to be corrected.

In evangelical circles the most common way of talking about the gospel of Jesus Christ is by the words "sin," "atonement," "the new birth," "believing on Jesus," and related concepts. It is no surprise that this is so, for these are the dominant biblical terms, and they are correctly at the heart of our Christian proclamation. But what if these words were missing from the English language? Or what if, which is nearly the same thing, these words and what they mean are missing from the thoughts of someone to whom we are speaking about the gospel? Can other terms be used? My study of the Bible indicates that they can. Thus, to give just one example, it is possible to speak of the will of God, our rebellion against that will, and God's activity in Christ and through the Holy Spirit to get our wills in line with his once again. The rebellion of our wills against God's will is sin; this is what the Bible calls Satan's sin (Isaiah 14). Salvation is that by which God again establishes his perfect and holy will in us so that we are drawn to Christ and begin to seek after holiness. Heaven may be described as that place

where the wills of those who are there, after having been disrupted by Satan, are harmonious.

Our text in John gives another set of terms for salvation. It says, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (17:3). Here the operative term is knowledge—"that they may know." Knowledge of God is salvation. By contrast, not knowing God and not wanting to is sin.

True Knowledge

When we speak along these lines we must be careful to define what we mean by that knowledge that is salvation, for there are several uses of the word that are not what the Lord meant in this expression and that, far from suggesting salvation, actually are used biblically to explain why men are guilty for failing to come to God for it.

There are four senses of this word that are inadequate. The first is that sense of knowing by which we actually mean *awareness.* It is what we have in mind when we say, for example, that we know the United States is governed by a president and a congress and that the headquarters for both are in Washington. This is not a very profound kind of knowledge, nor is it necessarily detailed. It is the kind of awareness a child might have as a result of something he or she has been taught in school. The Bible speaks of this kind of knowledge in Romans 1, saying that all who have ever been born into the human race have this knowledge and are guilty before God because, having it, they do not come to him. More precisely, Paul speaks of the wrath of God being revealed against men "since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Rom. 1:19-21). These verses are not speaking of a knowledge of God in the sense intended by Jesus when he linked a knowledge of God to eternal life, otherwise all would

be saved. Rather, they speak of the most rudimentary kind of knowledge. It is awareness only, but it makes us responsible.

The second inadequate meaning of the words "to know" or "knowledge" involves *information.* To return to the earlier illustration, we may say not merely that we know there is a president and a congress but also that we know much about them. A reporter covering the Washington beat would have much knowledge. But the type of knowledge would be the same. In spiritual terms this would be the kind of knowledge of God possessed by a theologian who, while he may know much about God, is not necessarily born again.

The third view is knowledge by *experience.* But this, although better than either of the other two, is still not enough. We might think of this as the experience of a person who goes out into the fields around his house on a summer night and looks up into the twinkling heavens and returns, saying, "I have experienced God. Do not give me any of your theology. I don't want words. I have experienced the real thing." We may believe that such a person is imagining his experience, particularly if it has nothing to do with the Lord Jesus Christ; but he is not necessarily imagining it, nor is his experience without meaning. He actually may have experienced something very profound and moving. Still, moving as this may be, it is not what Jesus meant when he spoke of eternal life consisting in such knowledge.

Fourth, even in its highest form this knowledge is *not merely knowledge of God alone,* for it always involves knowledge of ourselves in terms of our relationships to him. Knowledge of God and of ourselves go together.

What is this knowledge? It is a personal encounter with God in which, because of his holiness, we become aware of our sin and consequently of our deep personal need and then, by his grace, are turned to Christ who is our Savior. This knowledge occurs only where God's Holy Spirit is at work beforehand to make it possible, and it always changes us, issuing in a heart response to God and true devotion. This is involved even in Christ's brief statement, for he stresses that the knowledge of

which he is speaking is knowledge of the *true* God and of himself as Savior.

The True God

This brings us to the matter of knowing the *true* God as opposed to a false or imaginary God. It causes us to ask: Who is this God? What is the effect on us when we come to know him?

There is a story in the Old Testament that is helpful at this point. It is the story of God's revelation of himself to Moses. Moses was certainly aware of the true God prior to this time. He had been born into a godly home. He had undoubtedly heard of God's calling of Abraham and of His subsequent dealings with him and the other patriarchs. He even believed in God's promises to deliver the Hebrew people from their Egyptian bondage, for he put himself forward as the vehicle of that deliverance by killing an Egyptian. Still it is probably true that Moses had never had a personal encounter with God in any full sense of the term until God revealed himself to him in the burning bush on Mount Sinai.

Moses had been going along minding his own business when he noticed this bush. It was burning, which was unusual but not miraculous. The astonishing thing, which he became aware of gradually as he stood watching, was that the bush did not burn up. He went closer. After a while a voice came to him out of the bush saying, "Moses! Moses!... Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exod. 3:4-5).

What is the first thing that God revealed about himself to Moses? The first thing that God revealed about himself was his holiness. Here God was obviously calling Moses and desiring him to come close and listen to what he had to say. But the first words Moses heard were: "Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals." And the reason given was that even the ground was holy by virtue of God being in that place. Holiness! That is the first and most important thing that fallen men and women have to learn about the true God, and accompanying that they

have to learn that sin bars their access to him. Moses was apparently aware of this instantly, for we read in the next verse: "Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God" (v. 6).

Let me ask in a personal way: Have you ever had the experience of being afraid to look on God because of his holiness and your sin? I do not mean: "Are you always afraid of God?" or "Do you not know that you should be afraid of God?" If you have also believed on Jesus Christ, you have learned that God has made provision to blot out your sin through Christ's sacrifice and that you can therefore come to him boldly and joyfully on that basis. What I do mean is: Have you *ever* been really disturbed knowing that you must ultimately deal with One in whom is no sin at all, who cannot tolerate sin in any form and who must judge it? If you have not really known God in that way, then I suggest that in a sense you do not know even the first thing about him, at least not deeply. Consequently, you do not really know much about the depth of your sin or the true measure of God's great grace.

God's Knowledge

The second thing that God revealed about himself to Moses was his own knowledge of things or, as we would say in more precise language, his omniscience. In this account God spoke to Moses, Moses hid his face, and then God began to tell what he had seen and heard concerning the condition of the people of Israel in Egypt. "*I have indeed seen* the misery of my people in Egypt. I *have heard* them crying out because of their slave drivers, and am *concerned about* their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians.... Now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and *I have seen* the way the Egyptians are oppressing them" (vv. 79). "I have seen.... I have heard.... I am concerned," and therefore, "I have come"—these are the words God uses. They speak of omniscience. And if Moses did not get the point in this declaration—because he was hiding his face and undoubtedly trembling in his shoeless feet—he soon got it later, for God showed that he knew all about Moses too, his strengths and weaknesses—and about what was coming, for God foretold difficulties, saying that

Pharaoh would not willingly consent to Moses' demands, in fact, that he would strongly resist them and would let go eventually only after God had done many wonders in Egypt.

Why is it important to know this about God? Why is it important to know that he knows everything? The answer is in two areas. First, we must know that God is omniscient so that we will not be tempted to try to fool him with some exalted portrayal of our own deep devotion or loyalty. If we could, we would try to convince God that we are serious about following him when actually we would be going our own way. We would try to appear good, when we are not; loving, when we are actually motivated by hatred or antipathy; humble, when we are filled with pride.

God is not fooled by such things. He is not fooled by anything. Consequently, we are to learn that, whatever our relationships to others may be, our relationships with God must be based on total honesty, as he is honest. We must know that "everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13).

The second area in which knowledge of the omniscience of God is important to us concerns our trust in him. If God did not know everything, if something could at any moment rise up to surprise him, then God could not be trusted. For however good his intentions, the unexpected thing might cause him to change his mind or actually change him so that he would no longer be the God we knew originally. His promises could not be trusted, for he might decide to break or change them on the basis of this new knowledge. He might even change his attitude toward us, for we might surprise him by the sin we commit and thus cause him to look upon us with abhorrence or even apathy. If God does not truly know everything, any of this is possible. On the other hand, if God does know all things both in the past and future, then nothing unforeseen can change him. He has seen the end from the beginning. He has taken all into consideration. Nothing we can ever do will surprise him. Thus, his promises can be believed, and he can be trusted to remain the same in himself and toward us forever.

Our Sovereign God

The third thing that Moses learned about God was his sovereignty. This was personal too, for it was expressed to Moses in terms of God's demand that he return to Egypt with God's message to Pharaoh: "Let my people go." Moses did not want to do it. He was like the rest of us who do not want to do anything difficult and who often are content only when God blesses us while allowing us to do nothing. Moses made excuses, but they were not valid. He asked for signs; God provided them. At last God intensified the tone of his orders, and Moses, who eventually ran out of excuses, succumbed.

Have you learned this about God, that the God of the Bible, the true God, is a sovereign God who will be obeyed and who will most certainly see his will rather than ours done in the universe? There is no other God. Any god less than this is not God. So why do we fight him? Why do we find this matter of doing the will of God so unwelcome?

Knowing God

Here we come to the true problem in the knowledge of God, for the problem is not that God has not revealed himself in at least a partial way or that we do not have the physical ability to seek after him for salvation, if we would. The problem is that we do not want to do this, and the reason we do not is that we find the true God, who is there to be known, threatening. His holiness is threatening. His knowledge is threatening. His sovereignty is threatening. All that can be known of God is threatening, profoundly so when we are yet in our sins, but also sometimes even after God has brought us to faith in himself through Jesus Christ.

God knows this. He knows that we do not know him and do not want to know him. Therefore, he has taken steps to reveal himself to us in spite of our sinful dispositions against him. He has done three things.

First, God has revealed himself in history. This special revelation is in addition to that general revelation of himself in nature of which all have an awareness but to which none will respond.
This revelation consists of direct supernatural interventions in earthly affairs. In the Old Testament this was centered in God's actions on behalf of the nation of Israel, in their deliverance, guidance, and preservation. In the New Testament it centers primarily in Jesus, the fullness of God's personal revelation. This One died for us. He paid the price of our sin. He shows the nature of God to be love, while at the same time he satisfies God's justice.

Second, God has revealed himself in writing. This has two purposes: one, that we might know what God has done and, two, that we might understand it. We would not even know what Jesus had said, as in the case of this particular text, for example, if God had not caused these things to be put down on paper and be preserved throughout the years of church history to our own generation. Nor would we understand these things, even if they were recorded, had God not given an interpretation along with the facts.

Finally, God also reveals himself to us personally, applying these truths to us by the work of his own Holy Spirit. So great is our sin, so warped our knowledge, that even with the interpretation of his acts in Scripture we would not know God or understand his ways, apart from this activity. What light does this throw on our knowledge? It shows it to be God's gift, for notice that in John 17:2-3, Jesus speaks, first of all, of his gift of eternal life to as many as God has given him and then, secondly, that this eternal life is to be found in spiritual knowledge. This makes knowledge itself God's gift. And so it is, for no one would ever know God in the fullest sense unless God first revealed himself and then made the reception of this knowledge possible.

Chapter 208.
A Good Work Done

John 17:4

There are few things in life more truly satisfying to a human being than a job well done. Some people never know this satisfaction, because they never do anything well. But those who do, who really work at something and see it to completion, know. It is the satisfaction of a student who has finished his course with high honors, the satisfaction of a musician who has at last mastered a difficult piece. It is, to give a specific biblical example, the satisfaction of the apostle Paul, who said to Timothy near the end of his life, "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

In all honesty, however, we must say that although there is often satisfaction for us in a job well done, there is never that satisfaction that we would have if we could say that the job was done perfectly or

completely. There is only one human being who ever lived who could say that, and that was the Lord Jesus Christ whose words on this subject we are to study.

What is it we do? We do many things; but most of them are not finished, and none are done perfectly. I am sure that every housewife and mother will admit readily that her job is never finished. We even have a saying for it: "A woman's work is never done." There are always dishes to wash, cleaning to do, meals to prepare, children to help with their homework, and countless other chores. If she works outside the home, she has these (or some of these) perpetual problems plus others. Husbands, for their part, have the continuing obligations of their job. Our work is never completed, and we never do even the individual parts of what we have to do, perfectly. Yet this was not true of Jesus, for he said of his work, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4).

As we study this verse we find that it has three parts: first, that a work was given to the Lord Jesus Christ by the Father; second, that Jesus completed that work; and third, that the result was the giving of glory to God.

Christ's Work

The first thing this verse tells us is that Jesus was given a work to do by God. What a great work it was! It was the work of all works! It was an achievement before which all other achievements pale into virtual insignificance.

In a sense, everything that Jesus had done was an aspect of the work he was given, and God was glorified by it. We know that Jesus was active in the creation of all the worlds of our universe. Colossians says of him, "For by him [Christ] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (1:1617). We know too that it was Jesus who, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, guided

the fortunes of the Jewish people during the Old Testament period. He may even have been that mysterious figure, the "angel of the Lord," who appears at such strategic moments in the history of the patriarchs and those who followed them (Gen. 16:7-14; 22:11-15; Exod. 3:2; Judg. 2:1-4; 5:23; 6:11-24; 13:3). Finally, it is true that the work includes the whole of Christ's life and ministry, beginning with his birth in the stable in Bethlehem and including all his teachings, acts, and miracles. Since he is speaking in the past tense in this verse, at the end of this ministry, it is this that is particularly in view.

Yet none of these things can possibly be the heart of what Jesus is speaking about, for the great work that was given to him and that he completed perfectly was the atonement for sin, which he alone accomplished on the cross. Therefore, it is this above all that he declares he has finished.

It is not a real difficulty to this understanding of the verse that Jesus speaks here in the past tense while, in point of fact, the death on the cross was not yet actually completed, for the prayer as a whole looks forward to the death and even beyond it with such assurance that it is as though these things had already been accomplished, as they surely were in Christ's mind. Besides, we have that interesting repetition of the phrase "It is finished" later, when Jesus is actually hanging on the cross just before he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (John 19:30). This second reference fixes the meaning of this early reference precisely. In the same vein, we note that Jesus had said earlier, "And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour" (12:27). The meaning of this verse is that above everything else Christ came to die on the cross.

A Finished Work

We must go on to the second point of this verse. The first point is that the Father had given Jesus a great work of salvation to do. It is a great point, but while it is great, the second is even greater, for having been given this work, Jesus did not merely attempt it and then drop it or else carry it forward a little bit and then stop. He finished the work, as a

token of which he was subsequently raised from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of the Father.

Do you find that satisfying? I know one person who is satisfied with that work. God is satisfied. We know that God was satisfied by Christ's death by the resurrection of Christ, for the resurrection is God's seal upon Christ's work. Paul writes of this in Romans saying succinctly that Jesus "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (4:24-25). This does not mean that we were justified by Christ's resurrection; it was his death that did that. Rather, it means that by the resurrection God gave notice that Christ's death was that perfect substitution for sin he entered this world to make and that he, the Father, had accepted it in place of the condemnation of the sinner.

Ralph L. Keiper told of the time in his youth when his family lived on borrowed money. They were a poor family and sometimes had to depend on what they called "household finance." It was a bad system, for in the end they paid more interest than principal. As a boy, Keiper had the job of taking the passbook, which contained the record of their borrowings, to the bank and there depositing the amount that the family was able to pay back plus the interest. He did it for eighteen months and felt each time that it was a miserable experience. At last the day came when the final payment was to be made. It was terrific. First, he handed in the book with the payment. Then he watched the teller put in the amount paid, mark the last page with the words "Paid in full," and hand it back. Finally, through the window the teller handed him the bank's book against the family, and it too said "Paid in full." Now the account was paid, and no one had any record against them.

This is what the resurrection is to us. It is God's declaration that the account of our moral indebtedness has been paid, that God is satisfied. This just God will never demand anything else for our salvation.

I know someone else who was satisfied by Christ's death. It was Jesus himself. Can you not hear the tone of satisfaction as he turns to his Father on the verge of his arrest and crucifixion and declares without any wavering, "I have brought glory to you on earth by completing the

work you gave me to do"? Let us learn from this that Jesus is not sitting in heaven today wringing his hands, saying, "Oh, if I had just done so-and-so..." or "If I had just been a little more conscientious at that point...." He is not even wondering if something has been left undone, because nothing was left undone. When he came into the world he said, "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.... I have come to do your will, O God" (Heb. 10:5-7). While on earth he said, "I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!" (Luke 12:50). Then he accomplished it, fulfilling his Father's will. Now he looks back and is "satisfied" (Isa. 53:11).

What then? If God is satisfied in Christ's death and if Christ is satisfied in his death, should not we, who benefit from it most directly, also be satisfied? Yes, and more than that! We should rejoice in that completed work, knowing that it is our glory. We should sing about it:

Jesus paid it all,
All to him I owe;
Sin had left a
crimson stain,
He washed it
white as snow.

God's Glory

But perhaps it seems wrong to speak of *our* glory. If so, remember that it is not only our glory. It is the glory of Jesus and of the Father too. In fact, Jesus begins with this emphasis, "I have brought glory to you on earth."

How does the finished work of Christ redound to God's glory? It does so because it reveals God's great attributes clearly. We must remember from our earlier study of the word "glory" (in chap. 42) that to glorify God means to "acknowledge his attributes" or "make them known." It means proclaiming his sovereignty, justice, righteousness, wisdom, love, and everything else that may rightly be said about him. But where are these attributes best known? The answer is: at the cross, for only

here is the perfection of God's sovereignty, justice, righteousness, wisdom, and love abundantly and unmistakably displayed. We see God's sovereignty in the way in which the death of Christ was planned, promised, and then executed, without the slightest deviation from the prophecies of the Old Testament. We see God's justice in sin actually being punished. Without the cross God could have forgiven our sin gratuitously (to speak from a human perspective), but it would not have been just. Only in Christ is that justice satisfied. We see God's righteousness in recognition of the fact that only Jesus, the righteous One, could pay sin's penalty. We see God's wisdom in the planning and ordering of such a great salvation. We see his love, for it is only at the cross that we know beyond doubt that God loves us even as he loves Jesus.

Jesus revealed these attributes of the Father fully by his death. Hence, his obedience to the Father's will in dying, fully glorified him. No wonder we sing:

> To God be the glory—great things he has done!
> So loved he the world that he
> gave us his Son, Who yielded
> his life an atonement for sin
> And opened the Life-gate that
> all may go in.

This is God's glory... and Christ's glory... and our glory too, for we glory in Christ's death, rather than in any works or plans of our devising.

Conclusions

There are a few conclusions to this study, and they are as obvious as they are inescapable. First, if Christ's atoning work is finished and if it has been accepted as such by the Father, then what folly it is and what ingratitude it shows if we think we can add to it. Millions of people, many of them serious churchgoing people, are doing this. They do not disbelieve in Christ's work especially, but neither do they trust it wholly. Instead, they try to add to it by tears and confessions and charity and by every other kind of supposed "good work." They suppose that by these

things God may perhaps be moved to be gracious to them and so save them at last. What an insult to God! It is insulting to suppose that you can add to that salvation that he in his own great love and wisdom planned from before the foundation of the world and then brought to completion in time through the death of his beloved Son, the Lord Jesus.

Will you turn from your work to Jesus? His work is a great work, an all-sufficient work, a certain work. It is all you need. It is all that God will accept. Accept it then, and present it to the Father in place of your works.

Second, if Christ's atoning work is really a finished work and if God has accepted it as the sole grounds of salvation, let us proclaim it as such. We cannot honestly proclaim this truth until we have first entered into it ourselves. But if we have entered into it, having come to God on the basis of Christ's sacrifice, then we have an obligation to make this gospel widely known. It should be joy for us to do so. Many need this word. There are the pagans of our world, those who have neither heart nor stomach for Christ's gospel, who would willingly tread it underfoot if they were able. They need to hear that all that is necessary for our salvation has been done by Christ. He has died, and "it is finished."

The sophisticated, ethical people of our world need to hear it also. They think they are pleasing God by their efforts. But they are not; they cannot. Nor need they try. "It is finished." The work is done.

There are also the highly religious persons, some in other religions—Jews, Catholics, Greek Orthodox, cultists—some in our own. These too need the gospel. They need to know that Jesus has finished his work, the very work they need. Who will tell them? Will you? How can you not tell them if you have yourself found what they so desperately need? The Bible says, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (Rom. 10:14).

Third, it may be that you are quite busy and that you therefore react to what I have just said by replying, "But I cannot tell others about Christ's death for them. If I did that, so many other things I have to do would not get done." Do you say that? If you do, you must apply our text by noting that Christ did, not his own work, but rather that which was given him by God. You must ask, "Am I doing what God has given me to do? All of it? Or have I slipped my own plans in somewhere along the line, for my own benefit, and so ceased to serve him?" If you do not have time to tell others about the gospel or work to bring them to where they may hear it, you are *too* busy. Perhaps you are not doing the work God has given you to do at all.

Finally, it may also be the case that you really are doing what God has given you to do. You cannot say as Jesus did, "I have *completed* the work you gave me to do." But you can say, "I am working at the work you gave me to do." If this describes your condition, if you can say that, then the message of this text is simply: Keep at it! Do not quit! Hold to that of which God has made you the custodian! Yours may be a glamorous work but one with heavy burdens, as is the case with many prominent works. It may be an unspectacular work. Most works are like this; but so was Christ's work, at least from the world's unsanctified perspective. Moreover, receive this encouragement: while it is true that you and I will never fully finish our work in the sense of having done it to perfection, we can nevertheless finish it in the sense of hanging on to the end, Christ helping us. More than that, we can put a lot of "finish" in it by improving our service constantly by the grace given to us.

"I have finished the work you gave me to do," says Jesus. "I am working at the work you have given me to do," we answer. God give us the grace to do that always.

Chapter 209.
Prayer for Christ's Own

John 17:6 So much of what we do is selfish.

William Gladstone, the great English statesman, said, "Selfishness is the greatest curse of the human race." The poet Robert Browning wrote, "Man seeks his own good at the whole world's cost." We see it in our prayers. We pray for ourselves most of the time, and even when we pray for others it is often with a view toward what they can do for us or be toward us ("Help my wife to get better, so she can start doing the dishes again" or "Help my boss to become a Christian, so he won't be so mean").

Jesus is not selfish. Nor are his prayers selfish. It is true that he prayed for himself. In the prayer recorded in John 17 he begins by praying for what concerns himself—"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you" (v. 1). But even here the request is never for the Lord's interests as opposed to those of others. He asks to be glorified in order that he might in turn glorify the Father. Nor are these requests improper or even especially magnified. Thus, we have a record of one petition concerning himself, but of four for others. Or, to put it in terms of verses, there are five verses in the first section of this prayer (where Jesus is praying on his own behalf), but twenty-one verses in the next two sections (in which Jesus prays for his disciples, and for all who should inevitably follow them in faith).

Christ's Own

Verse 6 says, "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word." This verse says four things about
Christ's disciples. First, they are (or were) God's. Second, God has given them to Jesus. Third, Jesus has made God known to them. Fourth, they have received or kept the revelation. The importance of this sequence is that it is repeated in the experience of everyone who ever comes to Jesus. First, we are God's. That is, he can do with us as he likes. Second, we are given to Jesus. Third, the gospel is made known

to us by Jesus through his Holy Spirit. Finally, we receive this teaching. We cannot help but notice that our response comes last in the sequence.

First of all, Jesus says that the disciples were God's originally. "They were yours," says Jesus. In an important sense, everything that exists is God's, for he made it originally and can do with it as he pleases. This is true of the material world. From the tiniest atom to the greatest star or galaxy, all that exists is God's and obeys the laws that he has set for it. Moreover, we know that this is not some independent existence or some law apart from God, as if God were bound by it, for on occasion he steps in over his natural law to do what we instinctively term a miracle, thus demonstrating that creation is controlled by him and not he by creation.

God's right of possession is true in the realm of persons also. Events seem to go according to the dispositions of men and women; for, like the material world, God does not usually intervene supernaturally. Yet human events are no less ordered by him, and the destiny of individuals is also controlled. All things—whether material objects or persons—are in God's hands, and he can do with them as he likes.

But now, in addition to this general possession by God of all things, there is also a possession by God that is more specific. It is a possession of a holy people, who are his in this special way solely because of his election of them to salvation. In Romans, Paul speaks of this in terms of God's possessive foreknowledge, saying, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified" (8:29-30). It is this possession of his own by God about which Jesus is primarily speaking in his prayer, for he sets them off as "those you gave me *out of the world."* This possession anchors our salvation, not in any slight whim of the moment (which we might have), or in any faltering ability on our part to choose or keep choosing God (which we do not have), but rather in God's great purposes and possession, which alone are trustworthy.

Given to Jesus

The second point in the sequence of verse 6 is that those who were the Father's in this special, elective sense were then given to Jesus, so that they became his possession as well.

We do not need to treat this point at as great length as the point preceding, for we already looked at it in part when dealing with the verse in which the phrase "as many as you have given [me]" or "those you have given me" occurs for the first time (v. 2). In studying that verse we noticed that the phrase occurs seven times in all and is therefore somewhat of a continuing motif throughout this prayer. We must remember as we think of this that Jesus had been in the world for more than thirty years (by most estimates) and had probably conducted a public ministry of about three years' duration. What had been the result? He was in the world as the world's light. He was filled with the fullness of God's character. He was sinless, gracious, winsome and as loving as anyone could possibly be. But he was not loved for it. Instead, he was hated. He was about to be crucified. At the time of his arrest, even these who were now gathered about him would be scattered.

Where was any bright point in this picture? The bright point was that, in spite of appearances, these disciples and countless others who should follow them in faith had been given to Jesus by the Father. Because it was he who had given them, and because of his power, these would most surely come to him and would be kept by him through the days of their earthly pilgrimage and eventually be united with him forever in glory.

The knowledge that these had been given was a controlling perspective for Jesus as he went about his earthly ministry. He was confronting the sin-enslaved wills of men and women. So, knowing this, he did not deceive himself into thinking that anything was possible apart from God's purpose and power in their lives. On one occasion we read that, even though many had been impressed with him as a result of having seen his miracles, he "did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for he

knew what was in man" (John 2:24-25). On another occasion he said, "No one comes to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (6:44). Jesus knew the problem. He was under no illusions concerning the outward success of his ministry, as if by doing something spectacular or teaching more palatable doctrines or preaching with just a bit more eloquence, he could perhaps win a few more souls to his side. Jesus did not think like that. Consequently, as he went about preaching he was concerned to conduct his ministry as God had instructed him to conduct it, meanwhile looking about for those persons whom God had given him and expecting such to come to him.

Did they come? A few did. At this point in his ministry there were the eleven collected by him, plus a number of others who had been deeply influenced and who probably believed. They were not many. But these were God's gift to him, however few their number. Besides, there would soon be others. Jesus rejoiced in these and thanked the Father for them.

The Names of God

We must not think that our salvation operates in a mechanical way, however, for in the same verse in which Jesus speaks of God's activity in giving us to him he also speaks of his own personal activity in time to make the Father known to these people. Jesus is speaking of this when he shows that next in the sequence of God's application of salvation to the disciples is the fact that he (literally) had made the name of God known to them.

"The name of God" is a Semitic phrase for speaking about God's attributes. To make the name known is to reveal the God who possesses those attributes. If we think theologically in light of the full scope of the biblical revelation, then Jesus is saying that he revealed the God of the great biblical names to his disciples. There is the name Elohim, the name occurring in the first verse of the Bible—"In the beginning God [Elohim] created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). This name speaks of God as Creator; so we may believe that Jesus told the disciples about this aspect of God's nature. Another—indeed the great name of God—is Jehovah. This has a variety of meanings, but it is used

primarily in reference to God's character as Redeemer. Jesus revealed this about God. So with all God's other names: El Elyon, Jehovah Jireh, Jehovah Sabaoth.

Yet this approach to the names is only theological, and it is not the whole story. If by contrast we look at the matter historically, asking, "What is the unique name of God revealed to us by Jesus?" then we must say that the name is "Father."

It is not generally appreciated how unique this name was. Today we are at home with the thought of God as Father, but this was not true in Jesus' day, nor would it even have been thought to be proper. The use of this word (and in most quarters the failure to use it) in referring to God has been documented in recent years by two German scholars: Ernst Lohmeyer, who has written a book called *"Our Father"* (a study of the Lord's Prayer), and Joachim Jeremias, in an essay entitled "Abba" from the book *The Central Message of the New Testament,* and in a booklet called *The Lord's Prayer.* According to these scholars, three things are beyond question: (1) the title "Father" as a designation of God was new with Jesus, (2) Jesus always used this form of address in praying, and (3) Jesus authorized his disciples to use the same word, thereby leaving a tremendous legacy for the church.

It is true that in one sense the word "Father" for God is as old as religion. Even the Greeks spoke of "Father Zeus, who rules over the gods and mortal men." But in this case the word really means "Lord." In Israel God was also said to be the Father of his people: "But now, O LORD, you are our father" (Isa. 64:8), and "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on them that fear him" (Ps. 103:13). But this is characteristically of the people as a whole; nowhere, either in the Old Testament or in any other document prior to the time of Jesus, does any individual Israelite ever address God directly as "my Father."

Yet this is what Jesus does always. He always called God "Father," and this undoubtedly impressed itself upon the disciples to such a degree that they preserved it in their records of Christ's speech and prayers.

Thus, not only do all four Gospels record that Jesus used this address, they also report that he did so in all his prayers (Matt. 11:25; 26:39, 42; Mark 14:36; Luke 23:34; John 11:41; 12:27, 28; 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24-25). The only exception is one that actually enforces the importance of this title. It is the cry from the cross ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") pronounced at that moment in which Jesus was made sin for us and the fellowship which he had enjoyed with the Father previously was temporarily broken.

The Lord's use of this title indicates his awareness that he was the Son of God in a unique sense. But strikingly, he then revealed that it can be used by those who become sons of God (in a lesser sense) by their union with him. After his resurrection Jesus announced that the disciples could come to the Father as he came to him: "But go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 20:17). In the Sermon on the Mount he taught, "This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father..." (Matt. 6:9).

Is this important? Of course it is, for it means that while God is the great, high, exalted, eternal, self-sufficient, self-existent, and inscrutable God, he is at the same time and in equal measure the Father of all who believe. So we can come to him, not with a prayer that says, "O high, exalted and inscrutable God, far from us in your majesty, unreachable and unknowable...," but rather with that warm and personal prayer that begins, "My Father...."

Is God your Father? If he is, then he will be a Father to you during the days of your spiritual infancy when you are just a babe in Christ. He will teach you to walk, as it says in Hosea: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.... It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms" (11:1, 3). God sets our way before us and helps us in it.

Is God your Father? If he is, then he will be a Father to you in his paternal care. The laws of our country recognize that a father is responsible for the care of his children. God accepts this responsibility also. You need not fear that the great God of the universe, the One who

owns and controls all things, will let you down, that he will disappoint you or turn his back on you. This God clothes the lily of the field and the grass. "Will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" asks Jesus (Matt. 6:30).

Is God your Father? If he is, he will preserve you to the end and will permit nothing to change your relationship to him. You may disgrace him. You may be unworthy of your high calling. You may run away from him, as Jonah did. But he will still be your Father.

Christ's Word Obeyed

There is one more step in this verse. First, we have been told that those who are Christ's previously belonged to the Father. Second, we are told that they have been given to Jesus. Third, Jesus has filled his responsibility to them by revealing the Father to them. Now we are also told that they have received this word, or obeyed it.

In Greek the word for "obey" literally means "to pay attention to" or "observe," just as one would pay attention to a traffic law and observe it. But observing Christ's word is the end product of first hearing it and then understanding it to the point at which it makes a difference in our behavior. Some people have never heard that word. That is why we have missionaries, radio programs, Christian books, and all other kinds of gospel communication. Some people have never understood. Indeed, all fail to understand unless the Holy Spirit makes these things comprehensible to them. That is why we pray as we give out the message, for we know that our efforts are wasted unless God intervenes to do this miracle. But at last, there must also be the keeping of Christ's words, involving commitment and change. This had been true of the disciples. Jesus says so clearly. It must also be true of us and of all who would follow him.

What will be the results? There are two of them. On the one hand, those who have not obeyed
Christ will not like us. In fact, they will hate us, according to verse 14. "I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they

are not of the world any more than I am of the world." But on the other hand, we will be vehicles for Christ's glory, as it says in verse 10. "All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them." There is no greater privilege for those who belong to Jesus.

Chapter 210.
Christ's Word Kept by Christ's Own

How does one tell who are the elect of God? How do we judge who are Christians and who are not? We must admit as we raise the question that there is a sense in which we cannot judge and that the answer is none of our business. We cannot judge in this sense because it is a matter of the heart, and the heart is visible to God only. On the other hand, whenever we admit members to a Christian church or seek out Bible school teachers or church officers we find ourselves having to make a decision in just this area. And so, although we cannot see as God sees, the question remains.

How does one tell who are the elect of God? There are certain ways in which we obviously cannot tell. We cannot tell by the alleged depth of the spiritual experience of the person. There are those who measure reality by the depth of their feelings. In some circles this is even accompanied by a certain anti-intellectualism in which facts and doctrines are neglected and emotion is everything. The difficulty with this approach is that feelings come and go.
Consequently, such a person may consider himself or herself a Christian one moment and a nonChristian the next. Which is right? In which frame of mind should the person involved be believed?

Another way in which we obviously do not know whether a person is a Christian or not is by his or her denominational affiliation. All denominations are composed of a mixture of people, some of whom are Christians and some of whom, even by their own confession, are not.

How can one tell who is a Christian? There is only one answer, the answer given by the Lord Jesus Christ when he said of those who were truly his disciples, "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you" (John 17:6-8).

According to these verses, the only way to tell whether one is a Christian or not is to see whether he or she believes and continues in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Second Sequence

Of the three verses the most important for the theme of this study is verse 8, for it sets the matter of keeping Christ's words in a sequence of actions similar to the sequence in verse 6, which we studied in the last chapter.

In verse 6 Christ presents the matter of salvation from God's point of view, stressing his acts.
Thus, we find Jesus teaching: first, that believers were God the Father's initially; second, that the Father gave believers to Jesus by an act of sovereign grace; third, that Jesus exercised his responsibility to those he had been given by revealing God to them; and fourth, that they in their turn received or kept Christ's words. In verse 8, by contrast, Jesus presents the matter from the disciples' point of view, thereby in effect elaborating upon the last two steps in verse 6. Here Jesus says: first, that he has given the disciples the words that the Father gave him; second, that they have received those words; third, that on the basis of those words they have known that he came forth from God; and fourth, that they have believed in him as the One whom God sent. To summarize, the steps are: the giving of God's Word, the receiving of that Word, knowing, and believing. The believer is the one for whom and in whom these things have occurred.

The first step in this sequence, then, is the giving of God's Word, which Jesus indicates by saying, "I gave them the words you gave me." The Word is the only thing that is powerful enough to do what is required in the hearts of fallen men and women if they are to be saved. Nothing else can do it. The Word is God's tool. It is, as the author of Hebrews writes, "living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (4:12). Compared to this the words of men are next to nothing. Luther knew this. On one occasion he said, 'We must make a great difference between God's word and the word of man. A man's word is a little sound, that flies into the air, and soon vanishes; but the Word of God is greater than heaven and earth, yea, greater than death and hell, for it forms part of the power of God, and endures everlastingly" (*Table Talk,* xliv). Peter was thinking of the same thing when he wrote concerning the new birth, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23).

The conversion of an individual is much more than mere persuasion. If persuasion were all that is required, then our words would be sufficient and we could win men and women by argument. This is not enough. Arguments have their place. God uses them. But at its base what takes place in the matter of salvation is something like a resurrection, a miracle. Clearly, only the Word of God, not our words, can accomplish that.

This is why there must be witnesses and missionaries in the Christian church and why a bit farther on Jesus will allude to this need, saying, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18), and again, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (20:21). God could save the entire race by a fiat, if he so chose. But he has not chosen to operate in this way. Rather, he has declared that it will be by his Word, preached and shared by his people and applied to the hearts of individuals by his Holy Spirit, that men and women will be saved. We have a share in this great work, for it is by us that God's Word is conveyed to those who need so desperately to hear it.

Receiving God's Word

The second step in the sequence of verse 8 is receiving God's Word, for Jesus said, not only that he had given the disciples the words that God had given him but also that they had accepted them. The Greek word for "accepted" is not the same as the word for "obey" in verse 6. The word in verse 8 means only to "get" something or "receive" it. Thus, in going to a lesser word in verse 8, it is as if Jesus is backtracking in order to explain the harder word he used earlier. To "obey" his Word is, as he now shows, to hear it, receive it, know on the basis of it, and believe on him personally. The fact that Jesus puts in the step of merely receiving his Word indicates that it is possible to have the Word given but have it pass over the head of the one listening. Or, as we say colloquially, it is possible to have it "go in one ear and out the other." More than this is required. In contrast to merely hearing the Word, there must also be a receiving of that Word so that it sinks down into the mind and becomes the basis for our thinking and meditating afterward. It is a way of saying that God must actually communicate with us through another's witnessing or preaching.

Knowledge

Up to this point the sequence of giving and receiving the Word that Jesus gives has been obvious. The word must be given if it is to be received, and it must be received if it is to be of any use to us. But now, as a third point, Jesus goes on to talk about knowledge of certain things followed by believing, and this is not so obvious. We have always been taught that in spiritual things it is the other way around. In fact, Jesus himself taught this. In speaking to Martha just before the raising of her brother Lazarus, Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:40). The world says, "seeing is believing."Jesus says, "believing is seeing." How then, in John 17, can he seem to put it backward?

It would be a sufficient answer to this question to note that seeing and knowing are not exactly synonyms as Jesus uses them in these two passages. But the truly significant thing to note is that, while a full

apprehension of spiritual realities always follows upon belief, nevertheless there is a proper and necessary kind of knowing that must precede it. Otherwise faith is "blind faith," which is not a true biblical faith at all.

Here we come into the area of Christian apologetics and to the question, "Does faith need reasons?" More specifically, "Do we need reasons to undergird our faith, and do we need reasons to present that faith to others?" On one level, the answer to these questions is no, if by them we are asking whether all doubt must be cleared away before God can save someone. God obviously saves many without resolving their doubts, and some retain a great many throughout their Christian life and experience. But on the other hand, knowledge does play a role in faith, for faith is commitment to One whom we have come to know through the propositional witness of Christian people. We find the apostles giving an account of their belief in the face of critical questioning. Peter encourages those who follow him to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15).

In the context of John 17, this means that a certain number of convictions concerning Jesus must precede faith in him. These convictions will not embrace all possible areas of religious truth. Jesus does not even suggest that in this prayer. But they will embrace the central questions concerning both the person of Christ and his teaching. Jesus indicates this by saying, "They know with certainty that I came from you" (v. 8) and 'They know that everything you have given me comes from you" (v. 7). Before we commit our lives to Jesus we must be convinced that he is divine, that his teaching is true, and that he did what he said he did, primarily in dying on the cross. He died as our substitute, bearing the penalty for our sin. If we are not convinced of these truths, our faith is in a phantom.

Nor is it just for our own personal belief that knowledge of this type is important. It is also important for our motivation to evangelism. One of the great impetuses to evangelism is the conviction, based on knowledge and reinforced by experience, that the facts to which we

testify are really true. After Jesus' death, and prior to the resurrection, the disciples were downcast and scattering. After the resurrection they were impelled to tell others. Why? The difference was their conviction that the resurrection had really occurred and that it was important that others know of it. So should we think, if we share those convictions.

Finally, knowledge is important in the proper satisfaction of our minds. Some Christians act as if the mind is evil and so refuse to think, at least deeply. This is not right. Though fallen, the reasoning faculty in man is still one aspect of his being created in the image of God and is to be used by the Christian in thinking through spiritual matters. As this is done there is an element of true spiritual satisfaction and a preparation for being able to deal with whatever problems might come.

Faith and Action

Having stressed the importance of knowledge, we must not, however, fall into the trap of stopping there, as if Christianity were only a process of learning certain things. There was an early heresy of Christianity, a form of Gnosticism, which taught that. But this is not Christ's teaching, for having spoken of the three steps of having given the word, having had the word received, and having had the disciples come to know certain things concerning himself because of it, the Lord went on to talk about the most important factor of all, namely, faith or belief. He concludes by saying, "And they believed that you sent me"

Faith is not blind trust, as we have seen from our study of knowledge. But it is not only knowledge either. Rather, it is a personal commitment based upon that knowledge but going beyond it in the sense that, having come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as God, the one who follows him is thereafter willing to follow him in areas about which he has quite limited knowledge or in which he has doubts. Faith like this involves action. So we often say that in the biblical sense faith is believing God as he is revealed in Jesus Christ and then acting upon it.

Who were they, these few disciples? They understood little of his teaching. True, they believed that he had come forth from God. On one

occasion Peter affirmed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). But even in the upper room on this very night, Philip asked Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father" (John 14:8), and Jesus had rebuked him, saying, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (v. 9). They understood. But then again, they did not understand. At best they understood dimly.

Again, they obviously failed to understand the meaning and necessity of his death. He had tried to tell them. He had prophesied earlier in this week, "We are going up to Jerusalem... and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise" (Mark 10:33-34). He taught that "even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (v. 45). But they missed this teaching. What is more, even after the resurrection they were missing it, for they asked, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6), indicating that they were still thinking in terms of an earthly messianic reign.

Weakness? Poverty of understanding? Yes, but there was strength too. It was not their own. It was only the result of the words of Christ that had by now entered into them. But the words *were* within them. That is the point. Like a seed planted in fruitful ground, those words would sprout into the fullness of a fruitful spiritual life. They were alive—that is what we really want to say— spiritually alive. Therefore the Lord could be confident, saying, "They have received my words, they have known who I am, and they have believed on me as their Savior."

That is the experience of all God's elect. They may vary in understanding, courage, and many other things, but they have been touched by Jesus. They have his words, and they will inevitably continue to grow in the power of his life and be fruitful for him.

Chapter 211.
Prayer for Christ's Own Only

John 17:9-10

I do not doubt that there may be some limited sense in which Jesus prays for everyone. But whatever that may be, it is not what our text is speaking of. On the cross Christ prayed for his enemies: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). But between that (or any prayer like it) and the prayer of John 17, there is a gap so vast that in another sense we may say that Christ's prayer is for his people only. Moreover, this is what he seems to teach in the words that actually begin the intercessory part of this chapter. He says, "I pray for *them*" thereby designating the disciples. "I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them" (vv. 9-10).

Spurgeon, with his usual eloquence, says rightly of these verses, "I remark that our Lord Jesus pleads for his own people. When he puts on his priestly breastplate, it is for the tribes whose names are there. When he presents the atoning sacrifice, it is for Israel whom God hath chosen." This is a reminder of the unique position in which believers stand to him and that they must not desecrate by disregard of spiritual things or by sin.

However, the most interesting thing about these verses is not that they are part of a prayer that is for Christ's own only. Rather it is that they tell, from the perspective of our divine Lord, why he prays for them as opposed to praying for others. There are three reasons. First, because they are the Father's. Second, because all that the Father has is also his. And third, because he is glorified in them.

Christ's First Reason

The first of Christ's reasons is that those for whom Jesus prays *belong to the Father,* and this means that Jesus values them simply because they

are God's. We can find illustrations of this reasoning in our own experience wherever we have been entrusted with something that belongs to someone else and value it because it belongs to that person.

When I was working in Washington, D.C., for *Christianity Today*, friends whom my wife and I knew lent us their home for the summer. This was a great luxury for us, for we were just students at the time, and their home was in beautiful suburban Washington and had great trees and a large backyard with a garden. We valued the home because of our appreciation for those who had lent it to us. That summer we got busy in the garden on Saturday afternoons and in the late evenings. We mowed the grass. We dug up the garden. We trimmed the flower beds. We did our work so well that I think we dug up the bulbs that were in the garden. If a person can understand our appreciation for that house, he can understand how the Lord Jesus Christ values that which is his Father's, for what the Lord is saying in these verses is: "Father, I am praying for these persons because they are yours, and I am concerned for what is yours." This is wonderful for us and for others, for we are going to see, when we get to the end of this study, that it is also why we should value other Christians.

There is also a second thought involved in Christ's reason, for it is not only that we are valued by Christ because we belong to the Father. There is also the fact that we are valued *by the Father.* Hence, this also becomes part of Christ's argument. It is as though he says, "I pray for them because they are yours and you value them; therefore, your interest in them is as my own."

We would do well to go beyond the use of mere indefinite pronouns ("they" and "them") to put ourselves in Christ's sentence, for only then do we get the full force of it. It is as though Jesus said, "I pray for John Smith (Mary Jones, or whatever your name may be) because he or she is yours and because you value this one even as I do."

Though we have been given to the Lord Jesus Christ, as he says seven times in this chapter, the Father nevertheless has a continuing interest in us. Here we may use the illustration of the church as the bride of Christ.

We can imagine a father who gives his daughter to be married and then watches her go off with his son-in-law to a difficult field or work, perhaps in another country. The father is anxious to know how they are getting along, and the son-in-law is concerned with taking care of his wife, both for her sake and for that of her father. Suppose that things go badly for this young couple and that the son-in-law eventually writes back to the father at one point to say, "Father, I am sorry to have to write a letter like this, but business has gone poorly. I have suffered great financial losses. We are in jeopardy of losing our home, and I need some financial help." Do you not think that in circumstances like this the father would readily answer the request of his son-in-law (even if he did not care much for him and thought his business venture foolish) because of his concern for his daughter?

That is the kind of compassion that is involved here. So the argument goes, first that Jesus is interested in us because we belong to the Father, and second, that the Father himself is interested in us and values us because we are his possession.

Christ's Second Reason

Christ's second reason for praying for his own is found in the second half of verse 9 and in the first half of verse 10: "For they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine." What does this mean? It means that the Lord is speaking of *an interest in us that the Father and the Son share jointly.* It is as though, having said in the first instance, 'They are yours," he then acknowledges in the next breath, "but they are also mine; and furthermore, it has always been the case that everything that belongs to you as Father belongs also to me as Son, and that everything that belongs to me as Son belongs to you as Father." Jesus therefore comes, not pleading for a cause that is of interest to the Father only, or to himself only, but for that which is of interest to them jointly.

There is a second level on which we can consider this mutual interest. There is an interest between the Father and the Son. But there is also a mutual interest between the Father and the Son and *ourselves.* We see it in the way the pronouns are mixed up in the sentence: "they," "I,"

"mine," and "yours." They are literally thrown together. So we have a situation here in which we could say that those who are Christ's are wrapped up in the same ball of life with the Godhead and that the Lord prays for us accordingly.

This means that our concerns, however small, are God's concerns; and God's concerns, however noble and beyond our understanding, are our concerns also. The second half of this can be readily understood—God's concerns are ours in the sense that they are for our good and affect us, just as the decisions of a head of state might affect each citizen of his country. The first half— that our concerns, however small, are God's— is not so easy to understand. An illustration may help.

During the summer of the American Bicentennial, I visited the White House in Washington,
D.C., as a representative of an informal group of pastors known as the National Presbyterian and Reformed Fellowship. We had drafted a paper on the spiritual roots of our country and on the need for renewal. We wanted to present it to the President. So the head of our group and I went to submit it. We did not get to see the President. Instead, we presented the paper to one of his deputies. But as we were passing through the basement floor of the White House on our way to the north lawn (where the official presentation was to be made), I became aware of the fact that much life in the White House goes on, on two levels. Up above were the important offices where decisions of state are reached. Below, where we were walking, were people much like ourselves with far less monumental concerns. Moreover, in case I might have missed this, just as we were walking through the lower passageways a volley of trumpets sounded suddenly, announcing the arrival of an ambassador. The soldiers who were on duty on the lower level snapped to attention. I thought, "Here are these soldiers, each with his own problems, going through the motions of a proper honor guard drill, while just a few feet away national affairs will be debated. Each of the two groups is unaware of the other's concerns."

In human affairs this is often so, and we would be surprised if it were any other way. We would be astonished if the President and his cabinet,

or the President and the ambassadors, were to spend time looking out the window to the guards below and discuss their problems. "Do you think that guard's rifle is too heavy, Mr. President? Perhaps we should get him another one?" Or, "Mr. Ambassador, are you aware that Private Brown's wife (that's the third one from the left) is expecting a baby this June?" We would think that ludicrous. Yet the Father and Son, while not forgetting or neglecting the other great issues of the universe, are also involved in our concerns—no matter how small—because we are important to God.

Christ's Third Reason

Jesus gives a third reason for his prayer in the last half of verse 10. He says, "Not only do I pray for them because they are yours, and not only do I pray for them because we have a mutual interest in them. I also pray for them because *I am glorified in them.*"

How is Jesus glorified in us? There are several answers. First, he is glorified in us *by saving us.* It is his doing, and the glory of it must rightly and inevitably go to him. Here Spurgeon has written wisely, "When the Lord lays hold upon a drunkard, a thief, an adulterer, when he arrests one who has been guilty of blasphemy, whose very heart is reeking with evil thoughts, when he picks up the far-off one, the abandoned, the dissolute, the fallen, as he often does, and when he says, 'These shall be mine; I will wash these in my blood; I will use these to speak my word,' oh, then, he is glorified in them! Read the lives of many great sinners who have afterwards become great saints, and you will see how they have tried to glorify him, not only she who washed his feet with her tears, but many another like her. Oh, how they have loved to praise him! Eyes have wept tears, lips have spoken words, but hearts have felt what neither eyes nor lips could speak, of adoring gratitude to him."

Second, Jesus is glorified *by our trusting him in this life.* Donald Grey Barnhouse was talking to a man about the gospel. The man said to him in the course of the conversation, "But what does God want. Just tell me, what does God want?" Barnhouse said that the answer came to him

in a flash. He shot back: "What God wants most in all the world is to be believed. He wants to be trusted." Do you believe him? Do you trust him? Do you live as though you really trust this God who sent Jesus Christ to be your Savior? Do you trust the Savior himself? You do not trust him if you complain about circumstances. You do not trust him if you always worry about the future. You do not trust him if you are fretting over small disappointments every day. On the contrary, you trust him and thus glorify the Lord when you say, "I am his, and I will go his way. I am glad to let him have his way with me whatever the circumstances, whatever the sorrow."

Third, Jesus is glorified in his own people *to the degree that we live a holy life.* Holiness is the attribute of God most mentioned in the pages of the Word of God. To hear most people talk about God today you would think that the attribute most mentioned about him is love. But this is not true. To be sure, love is a wonderful attribute. It is all the more wonderful because we do not deserve it. There is nothing in us that could possibly call forth the love of God. Yet he loves. This makes the love of God particularly wonderful. But even with this wonder, it is not the attribute of God most mentioned in the Bible. The attribute most mentioned is holiness. So if we would glorify him, we must make his holiness known as, allowing him to work through us, we attempt to live upright and dedicated lives. If we live in spiritual adultery, compromising with the values of our society, if the priorities of our non-Christian culture become our priorities, we are not living in a way that glorifies him. But if, by contrast, the priorities of the Word of God seize upon us and we strive for holiness in our lives, then we do glorify him.

Fourth, we glorify the Lord *by our confession of him before the world.* It is important to believe on Christ as Savior and trust him. It is equally important to live a holy life. But in addition to this, we must also testify to his grace, simply because we are called to be witnesses and have something great to say.

Finally, we may glorify the Lord Jesus Christ *by our efforts to extend his kingdom,* that is, not just by our speech but also by our activity. Many Christians are lazy. They sit around and do nothing, content, as

the hymn says, to be "carried to the skies on flow'ry beds of ease," while all around there are suffering people, lonely people, people who need compassion, help, and, above all, the gospel. We need to wake up the church of Jesus Christ. We need to wake up ourselves. We need to sense the calling of the Holy Spirit in the area of our service instead of enjoying our luxury, comfort, and time selfishly, as we so often do.

Prayer for Others

In this passage we see Jesus Christ praying for us and, as he does, giving the reasons for his intercession: because we belong to the Father, because he and the Father have a mutual interest in us, and because he is glorified in us. But it is not only the Lord who has a ministry of intercession; we have a ministry of intercession too. We are to pray for others, and the reasons why we are to pray for others are precisely the reasons Jesus gave when he explained why he prayed for us.

Why should you pray for your fellow Christian? First, you should pray for him or her because that one belongs to the Father and is valued by him. What belongs to the Father and is valued by him should be valued by you as well.

Second, you should pray for others because you have a mutual interest in them in the sense that all Christians are bound up in the life of God together. When the Lord calls an individual to faith in himself he calls him not to an individual relationship alone, but rather he calls him into the church. This might not be the way we would do it, but it is the way God does it. He takes people from every nation, race, culture, and academic level, and he puts them together into one body, the church, to show that the binding principle is the love of the Lord Jesus Christ within them and the power of the Holy Spirit. We are together in this, whether we like it or not. Therefore, we should pray for one another, because the success of the other is our success, and his or her failure is our failure.

Finally, we should pray for others because God is glorified in them. Could it be that you would prefer not to have God glorified in them? I

think sometimes, when I hear of frictions that exist between certain Christians and between denominations, that this is precisely what some Christians wish. They do not like the other person or other denomination and hope that these others will do something horrible to show that they themselves are right in having taken the position they have. This is not right. Rather, God has called that one, whoever he is and in whatever circumstances he finds himself, in order that he might do something unique in him that he might bear a valued witness.

Chapter 212.
God's Perseverance with His Saints

John 17:11-12

There are many points in John's Gospel at which the great distinguishing doctrines of the Reformed faith are discussed, for it is "a right meaty Gospel," as one of the early Reformers stated, and therefore these doctrines are understandably found here.

They are in chapter 10, in which Christ's enemies asked him to speak more plainly, thereby implying that their failure to believe was due to his fuzziness in preaching. Jesus replied with the statement, 'You do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (vv. 26-28). They wanted the gospel said plainly, so Jesus spoke plainly. Thus, these verses contain a statement of man's hopeless depravity through sin, God's electing grace in salvation, and his keeping power over his saints. The same doctrines are also found in chapter 6, for there Jesus pointed out: (1) no one can come to him unless the Father draws him (v. 44), (2) all whom the Father has given to Jesus will come to him (v. 37), and (3) none of those who come will be lost.

We would be surprised if these great truths did not also occur in Christ's great high priestly prayer recorded in chapter 17, for although they have

already been stated, we would expect them to have a place (even a dominant place) in this most intimate prayer of our Lord to the Father for his own. Thus, we have, first, a clear distinction between those who are Christ's and those who are of the world. The implication is that the world cannot come to him for salvation and indeed does not. Second, he teaches that those who come are those who have been given to him by the Father. Third, he speaks of his own special ministry to them for which he is set apart. Fourth, he prays for all who shall come to him later as a result of the disciples' testimony, indicating that these shall believe. Finally, in the verses to which we come in this study, Jesus asks that they be kept by the Father and thus never be lost.

Here then are the great distinguishing doctrines of the Reformed faith again stated: (1) radical depravity, (2) election, (3) definite atonement, (4) irresistible grace, and (5) God's perseverance with his saints. Jesus expresses this last point by saying, "I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled" (vv. 11-12).

Christ's Second Petition

These words record Christ's second direct petition of this prayer. It is his first for his disciples. Earlier he had prayed for himself, asking that, having glorified the Father on earth by finishing the work that he had been given to do, he might in turn be glorified (vv. 1,5). Now he turns to others and intercedes for them. This prayer is for their safekeeping. The remaining petitions are for their sanctification (v. 17), unity (vv. 20-21), and eventual presence with him in heaven (v. 24).

As we look ahead to these other petitions, as well as to the one with which we are now to deal, we cannot fail to notice that they all refer to spiritual things. Marcus Rainsford, one of the most comprehensive commentators on this chapter, has noticed this and has written, "The

Lord does not ask riches for them, or honors, or wordly influence, or great preferments, but he does most earnestly pray that they may be kept from evil, separated from the world, qualified for duty, and brought home safely to heaven. Soul prosperity is the best prosperity; and, in truth, all temporal prosperity, as it is so called, is only real when it is in proportion to the prosperity of the soul. Remember how the beloved disciple brings out this thought in his third epistle. 'Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth' (3 John 2). Soul prosperity is the index of true prosperity."

The Danger

We turn then to the second petition itself, the petition for God's safekeeping of the disciples, and the first thing we notice is the danger that calls forth this expression of concern from our Lord.

First, although Jesus was leaving to go to the Father, these were not leaving. In fact, they were to remain *in the world.* This is a serious and almost ominous note in an otherwise joyful and optimistic prayer. Moreover, there is a contrast between himself in the position he was soon to enjoy and these in their position. Rainsford puts it like this, "I come to thy presence where there is fullness of joy, and to 'thy right hand where there are pleasures for evermore.' 'I come'—to where the river of the water of life flows from the throne of God; but *these, these* are in the wilderness. 'I come'—where no enemy can follow me, where no temptation can assail me, where no weariness can distress me; but *these, 'these* are in the world.' 'I come'—to reap the trophies of my great victory. 'I come'—to grasp the scepter, to wear the crown, and to ascend the throne. I have been weary here, but I shall soon be weary no longer; the way has been rough and thorny, but it is all over, my haven is almost reached; yet *these, 'these are* in the world!'" We cannot miss the importance of this contrast.

Do we need an illustration? We find one in that story of the disciples' storm-tossed crossing of the Lake of Galilee. They had been sent across the sea while Jesus remained on the mountain to pray. But a storm had

come, and he, looking down from the mountain, had seen their little boat buffeted and had come to them walking upon the water. Yes, he had come to them, but he had also deliberately permitted them to go through the period of struggle. Thus it is now. One day Christ will return for his own, but in the meantime we are in the world and he prays for us.

When he was here Jesus was their first and last line of defense. If they were threatened, he was there to receive the blows. If they were hated, he was there to allow that hate to be expended on himself. Now he was going, and the hate that had formerly been directed against himself would soon fall in equal fury upon the disciples.

Earlier he had warned them of it. He said, "Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me" (15:20-21).

Second, we notice that the disciples' danger was very great because *apart from God's perseverance, they would surely be lost.* This is the reason for Christ's mention of Judas at this point. We must not think, although our English translation seems to suggest it, that Judas is brought forward as an exception to God's perseverance with His saints, as though, for the sake of a prophecy, God consented to abandon Judas. This is not the case, for Judas was not one of Christ's originally. This is said elsewhere, and even this passage implies it. The phrase "son of perdition" is in the nominative case, rather than the genitive, which sets it off from the words "of them" which precede it. The true meaning is, "I have lost none of them whom you have given me, none at all. But the son of perdition is lost, as has been prophesied in Scripture." The reference is to Psalm 41:9. No, the case of Judas does not teach that a born-again person can be lost. But it does teach what would inevitably happen if God did not regenerate the individual and then keep in his care the one who has been so regenerated. If it were not for God, who

could stand? Who could survive the onslaughts of the world if God did not keep us?

The Lord, Thy Keeper

But God does keep us. That is the point of these verses and the object of our Lord's petition.
While Jesus was here, he kept those whom God had entrusted to him, and he kept them well. None was lost. Now he is about to return to the Father, and therefore he recommits those whom he had cared for to the Father's keeping.

This theme occurs many times in the Old Testament, often in rich images. For example, in Psalm 121, the image is that of a divine watchman or protector. In that psalm the words "watches" or "watch over" occur five times.

Another important passage is Ezekiel 34:11-16. In the verses immediately before this, God has been speaking against those who had been the shepherds of Israel, that is, Israel's leaders. They had not done their work. Now, says God, I will myself be a good shepherd to them. "For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice"

In Isaiah 27 God's keeping power is likened to the care of an husbandman for his vines. "Sing about a fruitful vineyard: I, the Lord, watch over it; I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it" (vv. 2-3).

These were the images upon which Jesus was drawing as he prayed for his people. Moreover, he had lived these images himself. We can hardly miss the fact that during the days of his incarnation he had been the watchman, the shepherd, and the husbandman. Now the disciples were to be committed to his Father—Israel's great watchman, shepherd, and husbandman. How could they be safer? True, the danger was great without. The danger was even great within, for they possessed an old nature that would surely drag them down into sin again and again. But over against this was One who was greater even than the danger. And he would keep them, even as he had promised to keep and actually did keep Israel.

"In Your Name"

There is one more point here that must not be lost. Three times in these verses Jesus speaks of keeping the disciples, once in reference to God and twice in reference to himself. But in two of these instances he also speaks more specifically of that by which they are kept. It is by God's name. In verse 11 we read, "Protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me." In verse 12, we are told, "While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me."

What does it mean to be kept in God's name? We have already seen a partial answer to this question in our study of verse 6. There Jesus said that he had revealed God's name to those who had been given to him. We saw in studying that verse that "the name of God" is a Semitic phrase for speaking of God's attributes. To be protected by the name is therefore to be protected by the One who is sovereign, holy, all-knowing, wise, compassionate, and anything else that can properly be said of God. And there is more, for to be kept "in the name" is not merely to be kept by God, as if he were only some distant force that could be called in to defend us if that were necessary. It is rather that we are actually in him, much like being in a fortress. Thus, his power and other attributes surround us constantly. Proverbs 18:10 catches this exactly by saying, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe."

Indeed we are! Can anything touch us when we are safe in that fortress? Harry Ironside came from a background that caused him not always to be entirely happy with some of the distinguishing tenets of Calvinism, but he knew that the believer's security was with God and readily perceived it to be affirmed by these verses. He wrote, "You may be sure that whenever the Father gives any one to Jesus, he gives him for time and eternity. Such an one will never be lost. 'Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.' People call this the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, but I rather like to think of it as the perseverance of the Savior. He says, 'Those that Thou gavest me *I* have kept.' If I had to keep myself, I would be hopeless of getting through. I would be sure that something would happen some day which would cause me to lose my hold on Christ and be lost. But it is his hold upon me on which I rely. None can pluck the believer out of his hand. I receive great comfort from these words. When he gives his account to the Father, when the last believer of this dispensation is safely arrived in heaven, he will be able to say of the entire elect Church, 'Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost.' You may think you know of exceptions to this; but it will be made manifest in that day that these apparent exceptions were like Judas himself, never really born of God."

I like that, because Ironside had it right regardless of what terms he used. We are safe, not because of ourselves (for we are weak), but rather because we are kept by the Lord Jesus Christ and the Father.

God for Us

And what of us? How shall we react to these teachings? Some say that if we believe in God's keeping power with his saints, we will go out and sin. "Why not sin," they argue, "if we are sure to be saved anyway?" How little such people understand spiritual things! Do we feel free to sin, because God is for us? Of course not! Rather we choose to go his way and seek to please him because he, and only he, is for us. Who else is for us? No one! No one at all! The world is not for us. Satan is not for

us. Even our friends are not for us when it gets right down to it, for all are for themselves in the final, grim analysis. Only God is for us. And lest we doubt it, we have the death of Christ on our behalf, the impartation of the Holy Spirit, and then the vast number of promises of God's perseverance, of which this is just one.

Shall we sin then? Not at all. Rather we will seek to please God. And what is more, we shall seek to persevere also, since we have learned perseverance from him. We will persevere in our work. It is often discouraging; we often see few results. But we will keep at it, for God has given it to us, and we must be like him in faithfully fulfilling this responsibility. We will persevere in our witness. Again we often find this disheartening. Men and women do not want the gospel. They hate the gospel, and they hate the God who gave it. Still, we will keep at it, knowing that the same God who is able to keep us in the world is able as well to save some out of it. He may use our witness as one means of doing so. Finally, we will persevere with our families. They are a special area of our responsibility, and we are often cast down when a son or daughter or wife or husband will not walk in God's way. Sometimes the situation seems hopeless. But it is not hopeless to God, and therefore we will not allow it to be hopeless for us. We will not give up. We will not quit. God is faithful. He is our keeper, and with God all things are possible.

Chapter 213.
The First Mark of the Church: Joy

John 17:13

What do you think should be the distinguishing marks of the church of Jesus Christ? Or, to put it in slightly different terms, what do you think should be its most important characteristic? I think that if that question were asked of me a number of years ago, I would have replied that the most important characteristic of the church is doctrinal faithfulness.

And after that I would have listed holiness, unity, and love. Well, I do not want for a moment to suggest that holiness, unity, and love are not important; they are. But I have been impressed, as I have studied the great seventeenth chapter of John, containing Christ's prayer for his church, that the characteristic of that church with which Jesus begins is joy. The prayer has three parts: a section dealing with Jesus himself, a section dealing with the disciples, and a final section dealing with those who were to follow them in faith. In other words, the prayer moves by stages from the Lord to the Lord's church. Verse 13, the verse to which we have now come, is halfway through the prayer; so it, not surprisingly, introduces this first characteristic. The others are: holiness (vv. 14-17), truth (v. 17), mission (v. 18), unity (vv. 21-23), and love (v. 26).

The Early Church

That most of us do not think of joy as a primary characteristic of the church probably indicates both how little we regard it and how far we have moved from the spirit of the early church, for if anything characterized the early church it is that it was a joyous assembly.

We see this immediately when we begin to study the subject of joy, for the New Testament is a book of joy. In the Greek language, in which the New Testament was written, the verb which means "to rejoice" or "be joyful" is *chairein*; it is found seventy-two times. The noun, which means 'joy," is *chara*; it occurs sixty times. Moreover, as we study these instances, we find that joy was not a technical idea, as if we were to find it only in highly theological passages. Rather it occurs most often simply as a greeting, meaning "Joy be with you!" To be sure, *chairein* is not always restricted to the speech of Christians. It is used, for example, in the letter to Felix about Paul by the Roman officer Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:26). But in Christian hands it obviously meant much more than it did with pagans and is used more frequently.

We notice, for example, that the angel who announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds said, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10). This obviously meant more than

"Greetings!" Again, we notice Jesus saying, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11). The things he had spoken were great promises. So the joy in this verse relates to the fullness of the Christian life.

When the Jerusalem church sent a letter to the churches of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia after the first church council, they began their announcement of the momentous decision regarding gentile liberty from law by the word *chairein*—"Greetings" (Acts 15:23). James begins his letter in the same manner—"Greetings" (James 1:1). In Paul there are many such greetings. Thus, when in a letter literally flowing over with joy, the apostle wishes to give final admonitions to the Philippians, he writes, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice" (4:4). As Barclay says in his treatment of this term, "This great greeting, 'Joy be with you!' rings triumphantly through the pages of the New Testament."

Need for Joy

But is the church today joyful? Are Christians? I do not doubt for a moment that we are all far more joyful than we would be if we were not Christians, nor do I doubt there are places where joy is particularly evident. It is often very evident in new believers, for example. But across the board in most churches, if one were to observe them impartially week after week, I wonder if the joy that obviously characterized Jesus and the early church would be visible.

No doubt we think of joy as something that should characterize the church ideally and will doubtlessly characterize it in that day when we are gathered together around the throne of grace to sing God's glory. But here? Here it is often the case that there are sour looks, griping, long faces, and other manifestations of a fundamental inner misery. The story has often been told—I am sure it is a true one—of the church in Scotland in which someone had obviously been bored by the sermon and had begun doodling. He had started drawing pictures of the preacher and then had gone on to writing verses. When the service was over the janitor found this bit of doggerel:

To dwell above with saints I love, Aye, that will be glory!
To dwell below with saints I know, Now that's a different story.

That is the difference between what we profess and know we ought to be, and what we really are.

We should be joyful, but often we are not. We are depressed. Circumstances get us down. Instead of the victory we should experience, we know defeat and discouragement.

God's Remedy

Since I am certain that none of us wants to remain gloomy—at least I hope we do not—let us see what we can find as a remedy. Is there one? There must be; for if there were not, what would be the point of Christ's prayer for just this characteristic? That he does pray for it indicates that he was aware of the problem that we so easily develop. That he prays in the way he does indicates that, in addition to merely recognizing our need, he also knows the way by which our depression can be overcome.

The first remedy for a lack of joy is obvious, for it is on the surface of the text. Jesus says clearly, "I say *these things* while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them." This means that the basis for joy is sound doctrine. When I first began to handle this subject in connection with my exposition of the Book of Philippians, I was surprised to find how many times joy is associated with a mature knowledge of God's Word. David said, "The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart" (Ps. 19:8). Psalm 119 reads, "I will rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches" (v. 14). Earlier in these final discourses Jesus declared, "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:10-11).

Someone may remember that at the beginning of this study we denied that doctrine in itself was the most important mark of the church, and you may feel that we are now reintroducing it dishonestly through the back door. But this is not the case, for what we are talking about in this area is not doctrine in and of itself but rather that experiential knowledge of God's character and commandments that we receive from his Word.

It is rather, to put it in other language, what Francis W. Dixon has called the "establishing" of the hearts and minds of God's people. This particular phrasing of the matter occurred in an address by Dixon given at the great English Keswick in 1962, entitled "God's Happy People." It was based on Psalm 34:8, 22, which he translated, "Happy is the man that trusteth in him.... None of them that trust in him shall be unhappy." He made the point that happiness (his word) or joy (my word) consists in having settled all our thoughts on God, his dealings with us, and his purposes with and through us. So long as we are unsettled, we are in a quagmire of doubt and inner turmoil. When we are settled in our knowledge of God, his will, and his ways, we can trust him peacefully and joyfully whatever the circumstances.

Dixon gave a number of illustrations. One of them concerned the wife of C. T. Studd, the wellknown missionary to Africa. Mrs. Studd was an invalid and could not go with her husband when he returned to Africa for what proved to be the last time. As he left she knew that probably she would never see him again on this earth. She knew that she might have to face years of loneliness. But she did not complain; nor did she become cast down. Rather she said, "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth." It was not easy for Mrs. Studd to rejoice in these circumstances, but she did. Dixon observed, "That is what I mean by having our thoughts established. Some Christians are only happy when everything pleases; when they can trace in some measure, or think they can trace, God's dealings with them. But others, like the psalmist, know that because he is their gracious and loving heavenly Father, who is planning their life for them, all things

are working together for their good and for his glory; and so they praise the Lord and bless his holy Name at all times."

Another illustration concerned the hymn writer Fanny Crosby. Fanny Crosby went blind when she was just five years old, and she lived to be ninety-five—ninety years of blindness. Yet she did not complain. Instead, she resolved the problem at a very early age, for when she was just eight years old she wrote:

> Oh, what a happy soul am I! Although I cannot see,
> I am resolved that in this world Contented I shall be.
> How many blessings I enjoy That other people don't!
> To weep and sigh, because I'm blind, I cannot, and I won't.

Does someone say, "Oh, but that was easy for Miss Crosby; for she was just a child and probably didn't know how important sight was. My case is different. I am trying to support a large family on an inadequate income, and no matter how we try to save we never seem to have enough." Another says, "But you don't know my circumstances. I am thirty-two years old and unmarried. My parents are dead, and I am lonely. I don't know what I'll do if I have to go on this way for thirty or forty more years." Another says, "But I'm an invalid. I can't get about. My circumstances are so hard." If you are speaking this way, you are indicating your practical ignorance of the sovereignty of God and are confessing that your thoughts are not really settled in him. Instead of this, recognize that he has planned those circumstances and look for his purposes in them.

Let me say something about circumstances, which we often think are so bad. Circumstances refer to things that are without. The word itself is based on two Latin words: *tircum*, which means "around" (as in the word "circumference"), and *stare*, which means "to stand." So circumstances are the things that are standing around us. They are external. But where is the Lord in this picture? Is he without? No, he is within. It is a case of "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). So why worry about what is without if Christ is within? To know that he is within and that he is directing us moment by moment, day by day, is the secret of that supernatural joy that is our rightful birthmark as God's children.

Fellowship

The second remedy for a lack of joy in the believer's life is fellowship, and that in two dimensions. There is a vertical fellowship: fellowship with God. And there is a horizontal fellowship: fellowship with one another. Jesus is the pattern for us in both cases.

One thing we are going to notice as we continue our study of these six marks of the church is that Jesus is the pattern for each one. And that is certainly the case here; for he was joyful, even though we call him (rightly, but perhaps one-sidedly) "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." We know this from our text, because he speaks here, not just of "joy," but of *"my* joy." It is this that he holds out to us. What was his joy? Well, there was a future joy centered in the completion of his work upon the cross, for we are told that Jesus "for the joy set before him endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2). But that is not the joy referred to here. Instead, it is the joy of moment by moment contact and fellowship with the Father. This is what sustained him in this prayer and on the cross.

It will sustain us as well, if we will only enter into the reality of that fellowship. Do not say, "But that is for Jesus; he was the Son of God, and I am just I." Are we not also sons of God? Is it not Jesus himself who has taught this to us? He taught that we could be born into God's family (John 3:3, 7). He taught that God could become our Father (John

20:17). Paul, who knew this truth well, declared forcefully, "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out 'Abba, Father'" (Gal. 4:6). Clearly we are sons of God also. Therefore, we can enter into the joy of Christ even as he entered into it—by constant fellowship with the Father.

Moreover, we can enjoy it on the horizontal level also. In fact, we must enjoy it on the horizontal level, for fellowship with the Father and with one another always go together. We remember how John stated the relationship in the preface to his first letter. He wrote, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete" (1 John 1:3-4). These verses indicate that fellowship with the Father and fellowship with other Christians go together. So if you are not joyful, it may be that you have cut yourself off from other Christians, perhaps even with the thought of establishing your own private fellowship with God. It does not work that way. You need other believers, and they need you. Without them your fellowship with God will be diminished and your joy will not be full.

Righteousness and Peace

There is one final part to God's remedy for lack of joy. It is that we must live holy lives, for sin will keep us from God, and the fellowship with him that we need will be broken. In John 17 this thought is suggested by the sequence of the verses, for immediately after speaking of our need for joy, Jesus goes on to speak of our need for holiness, adding, "Sanctify them by the truth" (v. 17). The same thing is suggested by Paul: "The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

Many Christians lack the joy they ought rightly to have, because they do not have the peace about which Paul speaks. That is, they are not resting in God—the point first made about having our thoughts established in him. That is one reason. But it is also true that often they do not have joy because they do not have righteousness. They go their

way, rather than God's. They disobey his commandments. They have their own way up to a point, but the Spirit's fruit evaporates. How much better to go God's way in holiness, to rest in him, and thus allow him to "fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him" (Rom. 15:13).

Chapter 214.
The Second Mark of the Church: Holiness

John 17:14-17

It may be the case—indeed it is, as I pointed out in the last chapter—that the first mark of the church is joy. But immediately after it, in fact, so close that it might rightly be thought to be competing for first place, is holiness. Holiness is the characteristic of God most mentioned in the pages of the Word of God and is therefore, rightly so, that which should characterize God's church. We are to be a "holy" people (1 Peter 2:9). We are to "follow after" holiness. Indeed, without it "no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). Jesus speaks of this characteristic of the church in our passage by praying—it is his second petition combined with the third—that God would keep it from the evil one. He says, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.
Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth"
(vv. 15-17).

What Is Holiness?

What is holiness? Some people have identified it with a culturally determined behavioral pattern and so have identified as holy those who do not gamble or smoke or drink or play cards or go to movies or do any of a large number of such things. But this approach betrays a basic misconception. Actually, although it may be the case that holiness in a particular Christian may result in abstinence from one or more of these things, the essence of holiness is not found there. Consequently, to insist on such things for the church is not to promote holiness but rather to promote legalism and hypocrisy. In some extreme forms it may even

promote a false Christianity according to which men and women are justified before God on the basis of some supposedly ethical behavior.

Paul had found this to be true of the Israel of his day, as Jesus had also found it previously. So he distinguished clearly between this kind of holiness (the term he uses is "righteousness") and true holiness which comes from God and is always God-oriented. He said of Israel, "Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (Rom. 10:3).

The biblical idea of holiness becomes clear when we consider words that are synonyms for it in the English language, namely "saint" or "sanctify." Christ uses the second one in verse 17. What is a saint? A saint is not a person who has achieved a certain level of goodness (which is, nevertheless, what most people think), but rather one who has been set apart to himself by God. It follows from this that in the Bible the word is therefore not restricted to a special class of Christians, still less a class that is established by the official action of an earthly ecclesiastical body. Rather, it is used of all Christians, as is particularly clear from Paul's use of the word in his epistles (cf. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1, etc.). The saints are the calledout ones who make up God's church.

The same idea is also present when, as in Exodus 40, the Bible refers to the sanctification of objects. In that chapter Moses is instructed to sanctify the altar and laver in the midst of the tabernacle. That is, he was to make saints of them. The chapter does not refer to any intrinsic change in the nature of the stones obviously—they are not made righteous. It merely indicates that they were to be set apart to a special use by God.

In the same way, Jesus prays just two verses farther on in this great seventeenth chapter of John, "I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified" (v. 19). The verse does not mean that Jesus makes himself more righteous, for he already was righteous. Instead it means that he separated himself to a special task, the task of providing

salvation for all men by his death. If holiness is to be understood at all, it must be understood in this framework.

A Worldly Church

Now we need to ask this question. If holiness has to do with separation (or, better yet, consecration) and if believers are already holy by virtue of their being set apart to God by himself, why does Christ pray for our sanctification? Why pray for that which we already have? The answer is obviously that although we have been set apart to God we often clearly fail to live up to that calling. We are indeed separated unto God but, to paraphrase Wordsworth, it is nevertheless "trailing clouds of old commitments, sins and loyalties that we come."

We are worldly in the sense that the world's values often remain our values and the world's priorities our priorities. I once prepared a series of studies on "The Secular Church," by which I meant the worldly church. I pointed out that the impact of the world's system on the church may be seen in four crucial areas, the areas of the world's wisdom, the world's theology, the world's agenda, and the world's methods. Each is readily observable.

First of all, there is the matter of the *world's wisdom.* The old wisdom of the church, in every age and in every denomination, was the wisdom of the Scriptures. Christian people stood before the Word of God and confessed their own ignorance in spiritual things. They even confessed their inability to understand what is written in the Scriptures except by the grace of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit who opens the Scriptures to us. Christian people confessed their resistance to spiritual things and the fact that, if left to ourselves, we always go our own way. But what has happened in our time is that this old wisdom, the strength of the church, has been set aside for other sources of wisdom with the result that the authoritative and reforming voice of God through the Scriptures is ignored.

Once I was taking part in a conference in which a theology professor disagreed with everything I had said. I had expected this from some

source, of course, but the words this man used were so forceful they stuck in my mind. I had spoken of the historical Christ in rather moderate terms, I thought. But this professor violently disagreed with my position. He said, "We must understand that each of the Gospels was written to correct the other Gospels. So it is impossible to speak of the historical Christ." Then, since I had also said something about Jesus' return, he added, "We must get it into our heads that things are always going to continue as they are now and that Jesus Christ is never coming back." I knew what to think of that! Peter had warned long ago that in the last times scoffers would come saying, "All things continue as they were from the beginning," and he encouraged us to continue in the things we have learned. But I tell the story to illustrate the problem we have. It is secularism in the area of the church's wisdom.

Nor is this an isolated incident. A pastor told me that after he had spoken to a particular issue at one of his denominational meetings, another minister came up to him and demanded, "Why are you always talking about the Bible when you stand up to argue a point? Don't you know that nobody believes the Bible anymore?" Then, because he had referred to the apostle Paul on this occasion, his critic added, "After all, the apostle Paul was not infallible."

A rejection of the Scriptures as the wisdom of God has serious consequences. One result is that another authority, a poorer one, inevitably comes to take the Scripture's place. Men and women cannot operate without authority. So if you put out one authority, another will come in. If you reject the authority of God, human authority will emerge. The authority that we have in the large denominations today is the authority of the consensus of the people who make up that particular body. In other words, it is the authority of the 51 percent vote.

A second result of the church's abandonment of God's wisdom is that the church becomes irrelevant to life. This is being seen widely, and not just by evangelicals. A number of years ago, speaking at a meeting of the Consultation on Church Union in Denver, Peter Berger of Rutgers University criticized the lack of authority in the churches today which leads to their irrelevance. He argued, "If there is going to be a

renaissance of religion, its bearers will not be people who have been falling all over each other to be 'relevant to modern man.'... Strong eruptions of religious faith have always been marked by the appearance of people with firm, unapologetic, often uncompromising convictions—that is, by types that are the very opposite from those presently engaged in the various 'relevance' operations. Put simply: Ages of faith are not marked by 'dialogue' but by proclamation." He then added, "I would affirm that the concern for the institutional structures of the church will be vain unless there is also a new conviction and a new authority in the Christian community."

Second, it is not only in the area of the world's wisdom that we are faced with secularism; we are also faced with it in the area of the *world's theology.* The world's theology is easy to define. It is the view that man is basically good, that no one is really lost, and that belief in Jesus is not necessary for salvation.

One consequence is that the theological terms that we have always used and which the church continues to use (because they are part of its heritage) are redefined. We still find people speaking of sin, salvation, faith, and many other biblical terms. But having adopted the world's theology, they no longer mean by these terms what evangelicals mean when they speak biblically. Thus, "sin" means, not rebellion against God and his righteous law, for which we are held accountable, but rather ignorance or the kind of oppression that is supposed to reside in social structures. Since sin is located in the system, the way to overcome it is clearly not by Jesus' death but rather by changing the structures through revolution.

In a similar way, 'Jesus" becomes, not the incarnate God who came to die for our salvation, but rather the pattern for creative living. We are to look to Jesus as an example, but not as the Savior. In some forms of this theology he is even considered to be what we might call the evolutionary peak of the race, a peak that we are all supposed to attain.

"Salvation" is defined, not as the old theology would say, as "getting right with God" or even "God moving to redeem us in Christ," but

rather liberation from the oppression of this world's structures.

"Faith" is no longer believing God and taking his Word at face value, because his Word is not believed or taken at face value, but rather awareness of the situation as we see it. This approach is closely related to Marxism, because Marxists say that commitment to communism arises from becoming aware of oppression and beginning to do something about it.

"Evangelism" is also redefined. It no longer means carrying the gospel of Jesus Christ to a perishing world, but rather working to overthrow injustice.

The second result of adopting the world's theology is an apparent contradiction to what I have just said, but it is still true. It is a tendency to ignore theology entirely. This is seen primarily in the church's preoccupation with the *world's agenda.* In the third century of the Christian church this meant the concerns of the Roman Empire under Constantine. In the Middle Ages it meant the Crusades in which religious zeal was exploited in behalf of political expansionism. Today? Well, what is the world interested in? We are told that the world is concerned with problems of hunger; therefore, that should be a major concern for us too. The world is interested in the problems of Third World, underdeveloped countries. That should therefore be one of our primary concerns. The world is concerned with racism. So should we be. Ecology! The energy crisis! Aging! Alcoholism! Anything you can read about in the evening paper should be a primary concern of the church.

I do not want to deny for a moment that these are legitimate concerns. But what I want to deny emphatically is that they are the primary concerns of the church. For what happens when the church makes these items its primary concerns? First of all, she begins to look foolish in the eyes of the world, because the world knows that she is attempting to speak about something for which she has no particular competence. The offices of the church know no more about world hunger than the great relief agencies or government spokesmen. They probably know much

less. Second, in emphasizing these other items as priorities, the church inevitably neglects that about which it really can speak, namely, the moral climate of our day and the remedy for it found in Jesus Christ. Worse than this, the moral climate of our country is endorsed in the sense of approving divorce, homosexuality, pornography, and other items.

Finally, secularism in the church is seen in the *world's methods.* God's methods are prayer and the power of the gospel, through which the Holy Spirit moves to turn God's people from their wicked ways and heal their land. That has always been the strength of the church of Jesus Christ. But today that power is despised by the great denominations. It is laughed at, because the methods that those laughing want to use are politics and money.

Years ago, when I was in college, I spent some time studying the plays of George Bernard Shaw, and I learned that one of Shaw's beliefs was that the religion of the future would be politics. The idea is in several of his plays. It is in *Caesar and Cleopatra*, for instance. Caesar is a religious figure in these terms. You find it most explicitly in *Major Barbara.* Barbara is a major in the Salvation Army, and she is converted in the play from Salvation Army religion to political activism. Politics is the new religion. This is what George Bernard Shaw, that old rebel, was saying years ago. But that is the philosophy of the church today: politics and money.

God's Church

The secularism of the church is bad, and I have taken space to describe it, first, because it is important to see how true worldliness works and, second, because we are going to be considering the cure for it at greater length in our study of the church's next distinguishing characteristic: truth. But we must notice the cure even now. Jesus makes it clear in his prayer by saying at the beginning of this section, "I have given them *your word"* (v. 14), and then again at the end, "Sanctify them by the truth; *your word* is truth" (v. 17). It is by means of the Bible, then, by

the Word of God, that we are to become increasingly separated unto God and grow in practical holiness.

Without a regular, disciplined, and practical study of the Bible, the church will always be secular. It will fall into that state described by Paul when he warned that "there will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Tim. 3:1-5). That is the secular church—"having a form of godliness but denying its power." On the other hand, by means of the Bible, God's people will become the opposite, for if the secular church employs the world's wisdom, the world's theology, the world's agenda, and the world's methods, the true church will invert it. It will employ the wisdom of God, the theology of the Scriptures, the agenda of God's written revelation, and the methods that have been given to us for our exercise in the church until the Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

Chapter 215.
The Church That Is Not Holy

John 17:14-17

We live in the midst of a divided church, but the division is not along the lines that are most talked about. Some say that there is a gap between laymen and clergy. I sometimes hear that the major division in the church is between those who believe in the mission of the church as evangelism and those who believe in the mission of the church as social action. I believe the real division lies between those who regard the church in purely secular terms and those who still regard the church as being based upon and as testifying to supernatural realities. The danger that confronts us, even as evangelicals, is that worldliness takes hold,

and the concern for the biblical gospel and spiritual priorities vanishes. In theory evangelicals object to the secularism of the church, but in practice we often are quite secular ourselves. Therefore, when we point the finger at others (and we must do that rightly in order to uphold the teaching of the Word of God), we must, nevertheless, at the same time examine ourselves. In other words, we must pray as David did: "Search me... and... test me... and see if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23-24).

Rampant Materialism

What are the areas in which the evangelical church, in spite of its theology, adopts the philosophy and outlook of the world? Where do we begin? The point at which it is necessary and obvious to begin is with our materialism.

Many persons point to this problem, and the fact that they do so should make us sit up and listen. *World Vision* magazine in its issue of January 1976, quoted a number of evangelical leaders who had been asked to write upon Western civilization and the mission of the church. Most of them, in one way or another, pointed a critical finger at our materialism. J. D. Douglas, editor of the *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* and editor-at-large for *Christianity Today,* wrote: "Pervading our society is an even more insidious materialism which makes Christians short of breath through prosperity and ill-equipped to run the race that is set before them." Horace L. Fenton Jr., General Director of the Latin America Mission, wrote: "In the Western Church we ought to cut back immediately on all unnecessary expenditures—including the elaborate building programs which have obsessed us far too long. It is just as much a sin for a Church to lay up treasure on earth as it is for an individual Christian." Frank E. Gaebelein, Headmaster Emeritus of the Stony Brook School and General Editor of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary,* wrote: "Negatively the growing materialism in the more affluent western nations is detrimental to the total Christian discipleship essential to the faithful mission of the Church." Each of these men puts his finger on something that is not just

a characteristic of our country or of the liberal church, but that is characteristic of evangelicals as well.

This is not a philosophical materialism. A philosophical materialism would be a materialism similar to that of communism. Evangelicals most certainly are not adopting materialism in that sense. As a matter of fact, there is even a negative argument that would go to this effect, namely, that because we are not Communists and Communists are materialistic, therefore we are not materialistic. But that does not necessarily follow. True, we do not have a philosophical materialism, but if we are honest we must admit that nevertheless we have a very practical materialism that is no less detrimental to the advance of the gospel in our age.

Francis Schaeffer analyzed our materialism rightly by saying that it is not so much the desire to be millionaires as it is to have two things: (1) *personal peace* and also (2) *affluence* to the degree necessary to enjoy our peace. Personal peace is the goal that causes us to say, "I don't really care much what is happening in the world so long as it doesn't bother me." The desire for affluence is not necessarily the desire to be a Rockefeller or an Astor but simply to have enough money to enjoy life to the full. That is the kind of materialism we have. And if our goals place both of these items high on our list of priorities, then we have an example in our own lives of the insidious encroachment of secularism.

If you are inclined to say defensively, as we naturally do, "But that's not true of me," let me put the question in this form: Is it true of you in respect to your desire for your children? What do you really want for your children, those of you who are parents? Is your first desire that they might be comfortable, that they might have a home, that they might be happily married? Is that what you put at the top of your list of priorities? If you do, this is materialism in every sense of the term. Rather, you should desire first that they might be men and women of God, obedient to his will and doing without those things that are necessary if his work is to be done.

This World's Fads

Second, we become secularized in that we so easily follow the fads of this world. I once had a conversation with Dr. Hudson Armerding, former president of Wheaton College. We were talking about the situation on the campuses, particularly of Christian schools, and I asked him what it was that bothered him most about our Christian campuses. He said, "It's the fact that the Christian campuses always seem to be following along behind the world; they have the same concerns, but it's always a year or two later." Then he spelled it out, noting that when the Vietnam war became a concern in the secular schools, it became a concern in the Christian schools too, but several years later. When ecology became the burning issue on the secular campuses, it also became a burning issue on the Christian campuses, but a year or two later. When women's liberation became the issue elsewhere, it also became the issue in the Christian world, but again some time later. What he was saying is that we have a case of the world leading the church rather than the church leading the world. And what is that if not the secularization of the evangelical community?

Let me speak about it in several other areas. We have a fadism in *theology.* We know, if we survey the Christian world, that we have a great emphasis upon psychological analyses in our time, upon small group dynamics, interaction groups, sensitivity sessions, and so on. But this has been popular first of all in the world through secular philosophy. Now it begins to enter the church in such a way that small interaction groups begin to replace the proclamation of the Word of God and a proper kind of Christian counseling. This is widely true in the secular church, and it is increasingly true in the evangelical churches, at least in recent years.

We have the same thing in *liturgics.* Liturgics has become a concern in the secular church, and because it is a concern there it has become a concern in the evangelical church too. So we have a great deal of experimentation in worship, which, unfortunately, in many instances is

not worship at all. It has such an undefined content that it is virtually impossible to distinguish it from the revelings of hedonism.

We also see an example of fadism in *universalism.* Sometimes I have an opportunity to visit on Christian campuses, and when I do I ask about the mood and thinking of the student body. I have been told again and again that the one area in which Christian students today seem most to depart from historical Christianity is in adopting universalism, that is, the idea that all men everywhere, somehow or other, because of the grace of God, are going to be saved. Where does this idea come from? It most certainly does not come from the teaching of the Bible. Rather it comes from the secular outlook of our time. The world does not want to look at men and women as basically bad in God's sight, that is, as sinners in the eyes of a holy God, but rather as those who may have a few foibles, but who nevertheless are basically all right. That is not the teaching of the Bible. Yet it finds its way into our evangelical churches and schools.

We also find that the world's outlook is being adopted in regard to *marriage*. We have marriages breaking up at a rate that has never been true previously. And, as I observe it, it seems to me that the unique thing today is that the women are leaving the marriages, not the men. It used to be that a marriage would break up primarily because the man would be unfaithful. He would have an affair. That is not what is happening today. I can point to numerous cases where the wife has simply said, not on the grounds of infidelity but on the grounds of a lack of personal fulfillment, "I have had it; this is not meeting my needs," and then has walked out. Secular values, now given popularity through the women's liberation movement, have begun to impinge upon the thinking of Christian people. As a result, God's norms are abandoned and personal desires are sanctified in the name of biblical freedom.

Madison Avenue Religion

The third area in which we see secularism in our evangelical churches is our Madison Avenue approach to Christian commitment. We see this in certain forms of evangelism. I want to be very careful here, because obviously the greater problem in evangelism is not doing it at all. If through a method we are able to rally people to the cause of presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who have not heard it, it is not altogether bad to do that, even if the method is faulty. But at the same time we have to recognize that secularism can enter in even here.

Sometimes Christians are required to memorize a certain stylized presentation of Christian truth.
This is something that in the hands of a person who understands the gospel well can be useful.
Certainly it helps to have thought through the kind of questions you might be asked and the answers that seem most helpful to most people. But to present the gospel in a rigid way, where the words are carefully chosen by a kind of popular opinion poll or analysis, is secularism.

We see the same thing in the way in which the gospel and Christian concerns are sold to our constituency; that is, through advertisements in

our magazines, direct mail, and so on. It should be said, in defense of this, that it is often the case that this is the only way in which evangelical leaders seem to be able to awaken the concerns of Christian people. But the proper stance from the perspective of the individual is to be ahead of the appeal in one's own commitment as to how to use money. In other words, before the appeal comes, when you are before the Lord on your knees, ask how the resources that he has given you should be used and then determine to do that on the basis of the Lord's leading and not necessarily on the basis of the sentimental pictures that happen to be on the front of the brochure that comes in the mail about three weeks before Christmas. If we are to overcome this in our life, these are the practical lines upon which we are going to have to operate.

Indifference

Finally, we see secularism in the evangelical church in our great indifference. Indifference to what? The answer is: to practically anything and everything worthwhile. Let me spell it out. First, we are indifferent to the *state of the lost.* Indifference is the number one problem in recruiting missionaries and support for missionaries. Short-term projects are well received; but the number of those who would commit themselves to a lifetime of missionary endeavor for the sake of Christ and who would support such persons is dwindling.

Second, there is indifference to the *suffering of the world's poor.* We are often so isolated from the very poor in North America that we seldom see deep suffering face-to-face. We do not know what it is to see someone who is so hungry that he or she can hardly think of anything but food. So we are indifferent to these things.

We are also indifferent to the *needs of our fellow believers.* If there is anything we hear in the evangelical church today, it is that evangelicals do not want to listen to the hurts in the hearts and lives of other Christians. We do not want to be bothered. We do not want to hear these things because they are demanding; they require a response, and we are not prepared to make it. Instead we want to rest in our own personal

peace and affluence, as I pointed out earlier, and we do not get involved.

There is indifference to the *leadership vacuum in the churches.* There is work to be done, but the hardest thing in Christian work is to find people who recognize the need and who will step into it and do what is necessary by the grace of God, faithfully, if necessary year after year and at great personal hardship. We do not have much of this commitment. I once was given a little poem on the role of the pastor; its conclusion was:

> Ashes to ashes, dust to dust;
> If the people won't do it, the pastor must.

But the problem is that the pastor cannot do it all. Moreover, if he is trying to do it all, a number of things, including the preaching of the Word of God, will be buried by the wayside. If people in the church are indifferent to obvious need and the pastor responds in their place, then the whole church suffers. Each one has a gift. Each one must be willing to use it to the glory of God.

The following question was asked of a number of officials in church circles recently: What is the number one problem in the evangelical church today? "Apathy," said an official of the National Association of Evangelicals. "Lack of discipline," said another. "Not caring enough," said someone who was involved in the Watergate scandal.

I conclude with this question: If these things are true of us, what should be done? The answer to that question comes from the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to the church at Laodicea, a church that he said was "increased in riches," like the church in America. He said, "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent" (Rev. 3:17-19).

The things that God counsels are these: first, "to buy from me gold refined in the fire." In Psalm 19:10 David uses the image of gold to refer to the Word of God, and in Psalm 12:6 he uses silver to refer to it. He does so because the Word of God is precious, of spiritual value. So what the Lord is admonishing us to do here is to master the Word of God by effort—that is the meaning of the word "buy," by effort, by hard work—in order that this which is the most precious thing on earth, the Word of God, might be ours in a personal way.

The second point of God's counsel is that we acquire "white clothes" to cover our shameful nakedness. Raiment refers to righteousness, and it is plural in this case: righteousnesses. What God is saying is that we should be clothed with acts of personal holiness. We should be zealous for good works.

Third, we must put "salve" on our own eyes so we can see. The counsel here is that we might desire afresh the healing of God's Spirit in order that we might see his truth and walk in it. That truth applies to us in our sin, to God in his holiness, to a world that is lost, and to a work that needs desperately to be done.

Chapter 216.
The Third Mark of the Church: Truth

John 17:17

In each of the previous discussions of the marks of the church we have touched upon the mark to which we now come, for both Christian joy and holiness depend almost entirely upon how well we know God's truth; that is, how well we know and practice the principles of God's written revelation. It is true that Jesus did not begin at this point in his comments in John 17; he began with joy and holiness. But when we ask, "How can I obtain and keep this joy?" or "How can I be holy?" we come to this point at once, for the answer is always, "Through a study of the Bible and the application of its truths to daily life. "Jesus

indicates this in our text in regard to sanctification by saying, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17).

It is a striking thing, which we realize more and more as we grow in the Christian life, that nearly all that God does in the world today, he does by the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of his written revelation. This is true of sanctification. Sanctification means to be set apart for God's use. So our text tells us that the only way this will ever happen to us is by an appropriation of God's truth as is recorded for us in the Bible.

So far as the truth goes, the world lives by an illusion, and this is an inevitable problem for us unless we have a sure way of countering and actually overturning its influence. Ray Stedman writes correctly of this problem when he says, "The world lives by what it thinks is truth, by values and standards which are worthless, but which the world esteems highly. Jesus said, 'What is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God' (Luke 16:15). That is how the world lives. And how can we live in that kind of a world—touch it and hear it, having it pouring into our ears and exposed to our eyes day and night, and not be conformed to its image and squeezed into its mold? The answer is, we must know the truth. We must know the world and life the way God sees it, the way it really is. We must know it so clearly and strongly that even while we're listening to these alluring lies we can brand them as lies and know that they are wrong." Stedman is saying that Christians should be the greatest of all realists, because their realism is that of the truth of God. This by its very nature should lead to their greater and greater sanctification.

Dead Ends to Holiness

If we are to receive the blessings God has for his church, we must receive them in the way God has planned to give them to us, and this means that there are many ways in which holiness will not come to us. It will not come through *preaching or listening to preaching,* for instance. Most of us know people who have specialized in Bible conferences and conventions to such a degree that they are fully aware

of the points at which one speaker varies from another and even at times of what a speaker is going to say before he says it. One Bible teacher said that "they can readily foretell a speaker's third point while he is still in the midst of the second." But this alone does not produce holiness, as such people often testify. In fact, they are often quite restless and confess to a lack of true blessing in their lives. What is wrong? Simply, they are looking to men for their teaching, rather than to God. And when they do hear the Word of God, they hear it without that full yielding of the spirit to God's truth, which produces growth through obedience.

A second way in which we will not find holiness is through *prayer* or, still less, through *prayer meetings.* Prayer is important, and the Christian who is growing in the Christian life will inevitably find that times of prayer, both public and private, are increasingly precious to him or her. But however valuable prayer is, it is not the God-ordained means for growth in holiness. Prayer is preparation for such growth. But at what point in prayer does God actually speak to us and direct us in the way we should go? It is only when God the Holy Spirit brings the words of Scripture to our minds or directs us to the Bible for the direction we need. Apart from this corresponding reflection on the Word of God prayer is merely a monologue. As such, it may relieve our personal anxieties, but it does not provide direction. On the contrary, when we study the Word and pray over it, God leads us clearly and keeps us from the suggestions of Satan or the kinds of autosuggestion (or wish fulfillment) that all too frequently pass for divine guidance in the lives of some Christians.

Third, we must not expect to find holiness through a *special experience,* sometimes called a *second blessing.* There is nothing wrong with special experiences of God's grace; in fact, it is a strange Christian life that does not have many of them. But the error consists in supposing that sanctification will come through one, or even more than one, decisive experience. It does not work that way. Consequently, whenever you find yourself looking for an experience, you are always on the wrong track and in spiritual danger. Sanctification comes rather from

seeking always and increasingly to have the Lord Jesus Christ exalted in our lives. And the way to do that is by discovering what he desires of us and for us in his Word.

At this point we are back to the central point of this message. Growth in holiness is through Bible study alone. Therefore, the third mark of the church must be God's truth.

Distinctly Different

We need to be very practical at this point, for in the preceding studies we talked frankly about how the secular church is characterized by the world's wisdom, the world's theology, the world's agenda, and the world's methods. The true church is not to be like that. But what does this mean practically? It means that the godly church must be distinctly, noticeably, and articulately different in each of these areas. This will involve individuals, for the church is made up of individuals. But it will also involve larger units—congregations, associations of congregations, and denominations.

First of all, we have to be clear as to what *our authority* is. One evidence of the secularism of the large denominations is that biblical authority, the authority of the Scriptures, has been thrown out and the authority of consensus has come in. Things are done in denominations today, not because the Bible says they should be done or even because the creeds say so, but because 51 percent of our people say so. If we are to be distinct in this area, we must do what we do because the Bible says so. We must be men and women of "the Book." In theory we are. We say that we are. We acknowledge that this is what our standard is. But much of the time, in practice, evangelical churches operate exactly the way other churches do.

We have to recover the biblical standard. This means that we cannot say, as I have heard evangelical men say on important issues, "Well, that particular thing just does not bother me." That response is not good enough. Instead, we have to get to what the Word of God says. We have

to study it, do our homework, and then we must ask: On the basis of this Word, what does God want for the church in this age?

We will have to do that sooner or later anyway, or else we are going to have to go the world's way entirely. This is so because history does not allow us to stand long in an ambiguous position. Someone has pointed out that in Germany, in the Nazi period, the church went in one of two ways: either it capitulated to the Nazi point of view or it became increasingly a church of the Book. Those who lived by the Book eventually established a communion of their own. They signed documents identifying themselves as the "confessing church." Why did they go this way? They did so because, when the whole drift of society and the culture is contrary to biblical standards, it is impossible to appeal to any external norms. You cannot say, "This is backed up in the area of psychology or science or social relations," because it is not. The things that are being written in all those areas are contrary to biblical truth. So the church must increasingly fall back upon the divine revelation. Has God spoken to God's people in this Book? If so, then we must be clear and say, "Let God be true and every man a liar." Evangelical churches are going to have to recapture that outlook.

Second, we need to be distinct in *our theology.* This pays off, because where it is done those who hunger for the truth of the Word of God will come to it. We see the evidence in our seminaries today. Enrollment at the denominational seminaries, where there is often no clear theology and certainly not an evangelical theology, is declining. But enrollment at the evangelical seminaries is growing. *Time* magazine pointed this out in an article some years ago.

The thesis of a book by Dean M. Kelly, entitled *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*, is that conservative churches are growing because they know where they stand and, therefore, people know where they stand and turn to them. But the same thesis applies to the seminaries. The seminaries grow for that reason too. They are an illustration of what we need in the area of theology.

We need to articulate the great biblical truths, not just adopt the theology of our culture. We need to speak of the depravity of man, of man in rebellion against God, so much so that there is no hope for him apart from God's grace. We need to speak of God's electing love, showing that God enters the life of the individual in grace by his Holy Spirit to quicken understanding and draw the rebellious will to himself. We must speak of perseverance, that God is able to keep and does keep those whom he so draws. All these doctrines and all the supporting doctrines that go with them need to be proclaimed.

Third, we have to be distinctly different in the area of *our priorities.* The denominations set their agenda. It is the world's agenda. We must say that our priorities are not going to be the world's priorities but the priorities of the Word of God. This does not mean that we will neglect social concerns. That is part of the priority of the Christian life. But it does mean that we will not reject the gospel of salvation through faith in the vicarious atonement of Christ either. And we will make the proclamation of this gospel our number one priority.

At the end of *The Invaded Church* Donald Bloesch talks about what evangelicals must do to change the world, and he says that what is needed is not simply an improved social environment but "a new kind of man." That is entirely right. That is what is needed. Then he goes on to give examples, and he gets into the area of racism and analyzes it like this: "For modern secular humanism, including Marxism, the poison of racism can be removed through social reform and education. Biblical Christianity sees this problem in a different light. The real enemy is racial and cultural pride, not ignorance. And behind this pride is unbelief, hardness of heart, what the Bible calls original sin.... Laws are necessary to protect the defenseless, but they can only hold the dike against sin. It is the gospel alone that takes away sin, and this means that the final solution to racism and other social ills is biblical evangelism."

We must be clear then, when we set our priorities, that this is where our emphasis goes—in time, money, and the choice of what we do and say.

A New Lifestyle

Fourth, we need to be distinctly different in the area of *our lifestyle*. This is something that evangelicals have not been too conscious of until fairly recent times, because we have lived in a culture that, although it is not Christian, has nevertheless held on in part to the vestiges of an earlier Christianity. This is disappearing. Laws are changing, and there is going to be more agitation to change in future days. When this comes Christians must be distinct in their lifestyle. We must say that we do not go with the trends of our times, the increasing secularization. Rather we must want to be known as God's people in these areas.

One of the priorities we must have concerns our time. Sports take an enormous amount of time in our day, by means of television and by our own participation. It is what many people do on weekends. There are evangelicals who find their time so taken up with sports that Christian activities are crowded out. Is that right? Is this not an area in which we have to say that the drift of our day is not in the direction we want to go?

A second area is the amount of time spent watching television. Statistics say that the average American watches television over five hours every day. Is the tube worth that time? The Bible says, "Make the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16). I wonder if many Christians are not missing out here and if the challenge of the age is not going to require us to sharpen up in this area.

How about the use of Sunday? I do not believe that we should have blue laws. I do not believe in proscribing what is proper and improper Sunday activity for anyone. But how do we use Sunday? Do we go to church? Do we want to worship God? Is sixty minutes, seventy or eighty minutes, on Sunday morning the whole of our Sunday commitment? Is it the total of the time we want to receive religious instruction?

I have noticed that the public schools are increasingly scheduling school events for Sunday, and this is having its effect on our children. Our

schools have the rest of the week filled as full as they can reasonably expect to make it. So what do they do when they want to establish a new activity? There is a glee club, and they need people to sing. There are sports, and someone wants to get in an extra practice. There is an orchestra, and they need time to rehearse. They set it for Sunday morning. We are going to see more of that, and Christian people are going to be confronted with it again and again. Are these activities more important than having our children in church? We must ask that question. We cannot avoid it. Moreover, we must be Christian people at that point. Even if it means not getting ahead as much as we would like, even if it means not being as popular as we would like, even if it means that our children are not going to be as popular as we would like them to be. We must say, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15).

When we do that we will have an influence upon the world. I know of cases where Christian parents have said to their children, "You are not allowed to do that on Sunday morning; we go to church at that hour." The children have gone to their teachers and have said, "We are sorry, but we can't participate; our family goes to church at that hour." And the teachers have said, "Oh, we didn't know anyone did that. All right, we'll change the hour." Victories can be won, but we must stand on our convictions.

Perhaps the most pressing area in which we have to be distinct is sexual ethics, particularly in our conception of marriage and the way we conduct our marriages. It is not easy to have a Christian marriage today. Everything in the world works against it. The great and overriding concern of our time is for personal satisfaction, and there is always that in marriage that does not seem personally satisfying. We wish things could be different. But the question is: What are we in the marriage for? Are we in it primarily for personal satisfaction? Or are we there because we believe God has brought us together with our spouse to establish a Christian home in which his truth can be raised high, Christian values demonstrated, and children raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? It must be the latter. Furthermore, in our speaking we must make

clear distinction between marriages that are Christian marriages and marriages that are simply marriages in the world's sense.

Not long ago I saw a fictitious marriage service on television. I watch these because I am curious as to how the writers are going to handle the vows. The vows, as everyone knows, are Christian. I wondered: Will they use them because they are the traditional vows and they cannot avoid them, or will they doctor them up to make them more secular? In this particular marriage service the couple promised to "live with one another and cherish one another, as long as—" I thought they were going to say, "as long as life shall last." But do you know what they said? They said, "as long as *love* shall last." In other words, "As long as I love her I'll live with her; but if I stop loving her, that's the end of the marriage." It could be a year, a month, a week. That is the viewpoint of secular men and women. A Christian marriage is different. Thus, when we stand to take our vows, we must be made clear that they are for life —"until death us do part"—because that is what God wants. And we must live as Christians within the marriage bond.

Finally, we must be distinct in *our use of money and other resources.* How do we use our money? All of us have money we could use in the Lord's work. Do we thus use it? Are we faithful in that area? Some of us do not even give the Old Testament tithe, let alone our life and soul and all that we have to be used in the Lord's own way.

Dependence on God

I have given four areas in which we need to be distinctly different; the areas of authority, theology, priorities, and lifestyle. These correspond to the areas of secularization delineated earlier. But there is a fifth point we need to add. We need to be distinctly different in our visible dependence upon God.

When I was at the conferences I mentioned earlier, something happened that was very revealing. When I spoke about the lostness of men I got a negative reaction. No one wanted to hear that men and women are lost apart from the grace of God. But there was one doctrine that everyone

seemed to agree with. It startled me. After I had spoken of the lostness of men, which they did not like, I stressed the grace of God in calling some to salvation. I said, "We cannot move men; we cannot change the world. If the world is to be changed it must be by God's doing, and for that we must pray and ask him." Surprisingly, they agreed with that just as much as they had disagreed with man's depravity! I began to analyze this, and I think I began to understand the reaction. It was because the people to whom I was talking were working in the social arena— trying to help alcoholics, serving those in the ghetto, looking for improvement. And what had happened? They had looked for improvement, but it had not come. So when I said that change had to be by the grace of God, their hearts said, "Amen." They did not like biblical theology, but they knew that the power of God is necessary if change is to come.

So there is a great opportunity for those who know the Lord to show that in dependence upon him changes will indeed come, not because of who we are, nor even because our theology is better, but because we know God and depend upon him.

Salt and Light

How can Christians change the world? The Lord Jesus Christ gave the answer in the Sermon on the Mount. He did not say that we are to maneuver the world. He did not say, "Get elected to high positions in the Roman Empire. See if you can get an evangelical to be emperor." It could happen, of course. He did not forbid it. But that is not the option he gave. He said, "You are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13), 'You are the light of the world" (v. 14).

Salt does a great deal of good, but it does no good at all if it has lost its saltiness. It is only when it is salty that it is effective. So, if we are those in whom the Spirit of God has worked to call us to faith in Jesus Christ, we really must be Christ's people; and it should be evident that by his grace we are not what we were previously. Our values should not be the same values. Our commitments should not be the same commitments.

Our theology should not be the same theology. Rather, there must be a new element in us and, because of us, in the world.

We are also "light." If salt speaks of what we are, light speaks of what we do. The purpose of light is to shine, to shine out. The Lord said, "No one lights a candle and puts it under a basket. It is to be set up on a hill where all will see it." We are to be lighthouses in the midst of a dark world. Being a lighthouse will not change the rocky contours of the coast—the sin is still there; the perils of destruction still threaten men and women—but by God's grace the light can be a beacon that will bring the ships into a safe harbor. That is what it means to be set apart unto God, to be sanctified. We are to be a beacon, knowing that as we are there will be cause for rejoicing, and the evangelical church will be blessed by God and thanked by those who have found the Lord Jesus Christ through its witness.

Chapter 217.
The Fourth Mark of the Church: Mission

John 17:18-19

A number of years ago, when Ralph L. Keiper was preaching at a missions conference in Deerfield Street, New Jersey, he told about a little girl who had come to see him early in his ministry. She was about eight years old. She had been to the church's daily vacation Bible school, and when she came into his study she asked, "Mr. Keiper, is it all right if I commit suicide?"

The young pastor was startled. But he had learned never to give a quick yes or no answer to a child's question without first discovering why the child was asking the question. So he countered, "Mary, why would you ever want to commit suicide?"

"Well," Mary said, "it's because of what I learned in Bible school this morning."

Keiper wondered to himself, "What was this child told?"

She continued, "We were taught that heaven is a wonderful place—no fear, no crying, no fighting, just to be with the Lord. Won't that be wonderful! We were taught that when we die we will be with Jesus. Did I hear it right, Mr. Keiper?"

"Yes, you did, Mary. But why would you want to commit suicide?"

"Well," she said, "you have been in my home. You know my mother and daddy. They don't know Jesus. Many times they are drunk. So we have to get ourselves up in the morning, get our own breakfast and go to school with dirty clothes. The children make fun of us, and when we come home again we hear fighting and things that make us afraid. Why shouldn't I commit suicide? Wouldn't heaven be better?"

It is clear that Mary did not believe in theoretical theology; she believed in practical theology, and she was facing a very practical problem. What she was really asking was why we are in this world anyway. If this world is such a sin-cursed place and heaven is such a blessed place, why do we have to stay here? Why does God not take us to heaven immediately upon our conversion? Or, failing that, why do we not all take our own lives and so speed up what is an inevitable ending anyway? Keiper answered by saying, "Mary, there is only one reason in God's world why we are here. And that is that through our testimony, by life and by word, we might have the privilege of bringing people to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus." He then indicated that, as Mary did this, it might be in the Lord's providence that her parents would come to know the Lord as their Savior. Later, her mother did.

A Missionary Church

Keiper's story is important in light of the fourth mark of the church. Up to this point we have been talking about those things that concern the church itself or that concern individual Christians personally. We have been looking at joy, holiness, and truth. But while these are important and undoubtedly attainable to a large degree in this life, nevertheless it does not take much thinking to figure out that all three of them would

be more quickly attained if we could be transported to heaven. Here we have joy; that is true. But what is this compared to the joy we will have when we see the source of our joy face-to-face? The Bible acknowledges this when it speaks of the blessedness of the redeemed saints, from whose eyes all tears shall be wiped away (Rev. 7:17; 21:4). Again, in this world we undoubtedly know a degree of sanctification. But what of that day when we shall be completely like him (1 John 3:2)? Or again, here we are able to assimilate some aspects of God's truth and know truly. But in the day of our final redemption we shall know fully. "Now we see but a poor reflection, as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). If this is true, why should we not go to heaven immediately?

The answer is in the mark of the church to which we come now, for the church is not only to look inward and find joy, to look Christward and find sanctification, to look to the Scriptures and find truth. The church is also to look outward to the world and there find the object of her Godgiven *mission.* Moreover, it is for this (at least in part) that the other marks of the church are given.

In the World

Our text talks about mission, and the first thing it tells us about that mission is where it is to be conducted. The word "mission" comes from the Latin verb *mitto, mittere, misi, missum*, which means "to send" or "dispatch." A mission is a sending forth. But as soon as we know that we want to ask, "But to whom is the church sent? Where are we sent as Christian missionaries?" The answer is, into the world. Jesus says clearly, "As you sent me *into the world*, I have sent them *into the world"* (v. 18).

Here is why the evangelical church in America is not as much of a missionary church as it claims to be. We are not saying that the evangelical church does not support foreign missions. In fact, it has probably picked this task up at precisely the point at which the liberal denominations have been dropping it. The problem does not lie there. Rather it lies at the point of the evangelicals' personal withdrawal from

the culture. Many seem afraid of their culture. Hence, they try to keep as far from the world as possible lest they be contaminated or polluted by it. They have developed their own subculture. As some Bible teachers have pointed out, it is possible, for example, to be born of Christian parents, grow up in that Christian family, have Christian friends, go to Christian schools and colleges, read Christian books, attend a Christian country club (known as a church), watch Christian movies, get Christian employment, be attended by a Christian doctor, and finally, one may suppose, die and be buried by a Christian undertaker on holy ground. But this is certainly not what Jesus meant when he spoke of his followers being "in the world."

What does it mean to be in the world as a Christian? It does not mean to be like the world; the marks of the church are to make the church different. It does not mean that we are to abandon Christian fellowship or our other basic Christian orientations. All it means is that we are to know non-Christians, befriend them, and enter into their lives in such a way that we begin to infect them with the gospel, rather than their infecting us with their worldliness, which is the wrong way around.

Many years ago now a young pastor in the Central American country of Guatemala went from seminary to a remote mountain area of the country known as Cabrican. Cabrican was unpopular, for it was located at an altitude of about 9,000 feet and consequently was nearly always damp and bone-piercing cold. The church he went to pastor was small, having only twenty-eight members, including two elders and two women deacons. These believers met together on most nights of the week, but they were not growing as a congregation. There was no outreach. So in his first messages to them the young pastor, whose name was Bernardo Calderon, said, "I know God cannot be satisfied with what we are doing." Then he challenged them to this program.

First, they abandoned all the many, dull meetings at the church, retaining only the Bible school hour on Sunday. In their place, home meetings were established. On Monday night they would meet in a home in one area of Cabrican, and all the believers would be invited. Moreover, as they made their way to this home they were to invite

everyone they encountered, including those they passed on the streets. Since they came from different areas of the city and took different paths to get there this meant that quite a bit of the city was covered. On Tuesday night another home was chosen, and the same method was followed. Only this time, naturally, different paths were used as the twenty-eight members converged; different villagers were invited. So it was on Wednesday and Thursday and the other days of the week, as the church literally left its four small walls to go into the world with the gospel. Within four years that church had eight hundred members. Moreover, the next year a branch church was started, and within a few more years there were six churches in that area of Guatemala, two of which had nearly one thousand members. There was even an agricultural cooperative in which church members buy land for their own poor and buy and sell the produce their own people supply.

The other story is also of a mission to the world in Guatemala, told to me by Mardoqueo Munos of the Central Church in Guatemala City. A young pastor went to the country's coastal plains, where the people are literally worked to death during the eleven months of the year that are the growing season, but where they have one month with nearly nothing to do between the end of one growing season and the beginning of the next. This church decided to use this month for evangelism.

Some time before the beginning of this period each year, teams of two or three people would be sent out into neighboring villages to investigate the state of the Christian witness in those villages. If the town had a strong church, they reported that it was taken care of. If not, they recommended it as one village to which their church could take the gospel. From these reports one village was selected. Then when the month of vacation came the entire mother church— pastor, elders, deacons, Sunday school teachers, husbands, wives, children, everyone —simply moved to the area of the target village and set up housekeeping. For the next weeks the members went from door to door throughout the entire village witnessing; the elders and deacons sought out a piece of property on which a church could be erected and bought it; the young people went to the nearby rain forests to cut down trees

from which a simple church could be constructed. Finally, they placed their converts in the new church, commissioned the most promising convert as pastor, and then went home leaving the new church to disciple its members and multiply its witness on its own. Unorthodox? Yes, even for Guatemala! But it was a successful strategy for that area. For in the eleven years that the young pastor has been in the plains area, eleven churches have been established; and some, including the mother church, have grown to nearly 1,000 members.

The point I am making is that these two churches were not content to carry on in a Christian subculture but rather knew that their mission was the world and that they were in the world to carry out that mission. For us this may simply mean getting to know our neighbors better or infiltrating those with whom we work with the gospel. Again it may mean a whole new approach to our church's outreach or that of our denomination.

To Be As Christ

The second thing the text talks about is the nature or character of the ones who are to conduct this mission, which means our nature or character as Christian people. The point here is that we are to be *as Christ* in the world. This is made clear in verses 18 and 19, for Jesus compares the disciples to himself both in the area of his having been sent into the world by the Father and of his being sanctified or set apart totally to that work. He says, *"As* you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that *they too* may be truly sanctified." In other words, we are to be in our mission as Jesus was in his mission. We are to be like the One whom we are presenting.

Here may be our second problem as far as the mission of the evangelical church is concerned. Let me illustrate by another story told by Ralph Keiper. Quite a few years ago, before Weight
Watchers, there was a product for those who were overweight called "Weight Right," and Mrs.

Keiper was trying to sell it. She was not successful. On one occasion she came to her husband and asked, "Darling, why do you think I'm not

able to sell this product?"

Keiper looked at it. He saw that it was well packaged; in fact, it was very attractive. He said, "Let me hear your speech." This was good too, for Mrs. Keiper was filled with enthusiasm. "May I see the brochure?" he asked. She gave it to him, and as he was looking at it he said, "Oh, oh!"

"Why are you saying 'Oh, oh!' at a time like this?" she asked. He said, "Shall I be polite or truthful?"

"Truthful, of course."

"Well, dear," Keiper answered, "you look like the picture before, not the picture after."

Perhaps that is our problem. We are tying to sell a product, but although the product is excellent and our pitch may be well done, the world can see that we are not using what we are selling. If we were, we would be more like Jesus. Are you like Jesus? Are you as he was in this world?

Perhaps you are saying, "I do not know if I am like Jesus or not. In what areas should I be like him?" Obviously we are to be like him in every way. But in trying to answer briefly we can hardly do better than point out that we are to be like him in precisely these marks of the church that he is citing. Earlier I pointed out that Jesus is our pattern in each case. Certainly we need to remember that here. In other words, as his life was characterized by joy, so is our life to be characterized by joy. As he was sanctified, so are we to be sanctified. As he was characterized by truth, so are we to be. So also are we to be united, as his body on earth, and to be filled with his love both to one another and to a perishing world.

We can readily see how each of these characteristics is important. First, there is joy. This is important because, if we do not have joy, we can hardly commend the "good news" of salvation to anyone. Someone once said to Hannah Whitall Smith, author of *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life,* "You Christians seem to have a religion that makes you miserable. You are like a man with a headache. He does not want to get

rid of his head, but it hurts him to keep it. You cannot expect outsiders to seek very earnestly for anything so uncomfortable." This is true. So rather than being miserable all the time, we ought to find ourselves becoming increasingly like Jesus who, I am convinced, was the best of company and a joy to be with. Moreover, our joy should be contagious and unending. A former archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, is reported to have said just before he died, "The longer I live the more convinced I am that Christianity is one long shout of joy."

Second, we must have holiness or sanctification. In fact, it is this that Jesus most emphasizes in our text. He says, "For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified" (v. 19). In what sense was Jesus sanctified? As we saw earlier, he was sanctified in the sense of being set apart totally for the work God had given him to do, the work of dying for our salvation. The parallel in our case is to be set apart totally for the work we have been given to do, which is the work of carrying the gospel of the crucified but risen Christ to all men everywhere. If we do not do this, or if we are halfhearted about it, the world will know it and will hardly consider our message to be earth-shattering.

The third area is truth, by which we are concerned both with our message and with our wholehearted commitment to it as a way of life. Jesus was committed to the truth of God and he was "the truth" (John 14:6). In the same way, we should be based firmly upon this rock and should live by it to such a degree that the world will point to us and say, "Those people are certainly characterized by the truth they claim to preach."

If this is not the case, we will not win anyone, for the world will hardly be attracted to a church that does not seem to know even its own mind on religious matters. There was once an essay by Leo Rosten in the *Saturday Review and World*, in which Rosten quoted a number of revealing statistics (July 12, 1976). A recent poll had shown that 75 percent of the American people think that "religion is losing its influence." Another showed that only 50 percent of Roman Catholics attend church during an average week, a significant drop. Only 37 percent of Protestants attend. The Protestant figure used to be up around

50 percent. Then, having given a few more statistics such as this, Rosten declared, "I cannot help concluding that the fortresses of faith are experiencing the most profound alterations in centuries. Church authority is being challenged on a dozen fronts.... It is not hyperbole to say that we are witnessing a remarkable erosion of consensus within the citadel of belief." That is true, of course, so we are hardly surprised to learn that the churches are losing members and that the church's missionary effort is being increasingly curtailed.

Next, we are to be like the Lord Jesus Christ in our unity. In fact, this is precisely the way in which Jesus introduces the subject in the next verses of the prayer, for he goes on to pray, "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (v. 21). The world is fractured in a million ways. It is the logical outcome of the work of Satan, one of whose most revealing names is the disrupter (*diabolos*). If Christians would win the world, they must show a genuine unity that is in itself desirable and winsome and that at the same time points to the unity within the Godhead, which is its source.

Finally, the church must be marked by love, if it is to be as Christ in the world. Jesus loved the world. It was out of love for it that he died. Consequently, if we would win the world, we must love the world too—not the world's system or sin, of course, but rather those who are in it.

Once my family was eating in a restaurant, and my youngest daughter knocked over her glass of coke for about the thousandth time. I was visibly annoyed as I always was (since we never seemed to get through a meal without the identical accident). But we cleaned up and shortly after that left the restaurant. My daughter walked along in silence for a while; but then she said, "You really hate it when we spill our cokes, don't you?" I replied that I certainly did. She looked serious, but then she brightened up as if a particularly happy thought had just passed through her mind. She threw her arms around me in a big hug and added, "But you *love* me!"

She knew the difference between love of the sinner and hatred of the sin. And so will we if we look to Jesus. We must be like him in love, knowing that if we are, the world will see it and be drawn to him.

Drawn by God

How will they be drawn? By God, of course, for however much and however carefully we strive to actually show forth the character of the Lord Jesus Christ in the world, it is still he and not we ourselves who must move men and women to turn to him for salvation. The description of the early church in Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 2, gives us an indication of this, for having told us that these early believers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching [that is, the truth] and to the fellowship [that is, unity], to the breaking of bread and to prayer [which suggests true worship leading to sanctification or holiness]" and "selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need [an evidence of their deep and unique love] and that "every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people," it adds as a result, "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42, 45-47). The Lord did it! And he will do it for us as we accept that task for which we have been sent into the world and live like him.

Chapter 218.
The Fifth Mark of the Church: Unity

John 17:20-23

Considering all the divisions that have plagued Christendom for two thousand years, it is amazing that God has continued to use the church to extend his kingdom."

This statement by John White, an InterVarsity Christian Fellowship worker and writer, introduces us to the subject of Christian unity in two

important ways: first, by portraying the unfortunate lack of unity that has plagued the church throughout its history and, second, by suggesting why Jesus asked that the church might be marked by unity at this particular point in his high priestly petition. The divisions that exist today are too obvious to need comment. They lie both on the surface and within. Battles rage. Highly praised church mergers not only fail to heal these divisions but also usually lead to further breakups involving those who do not like the new union. So far as Christ's reasons for praying for unity go, it is simply that he foresaw these differences and so asked for that great unity that should exist among his own in spite of them.

Another way of pointing to Christ's interests is to note that all the marks of the church concern the Christian's relationship to some thing or some person and that unity is to be the mark of the church in the relationships that exist between its members. Joy is the mark of the Christian in relationship to himself. Holiness is the mark in relationship to God. Truth is the mark in his relationship to the Bible. Mission is the mark in his relationship to the world. In this mark, unity, and the last, love, which in some sense summarizes them all, we deal with the Christian's relationship to all who are likewise God's children.

What Kind of Unity?

But what kind of unity is this to be? This is an important preliminary question, for if the unity is to be an organizational unity, then our efforts to achieve and express it will be in one direction while, if it is to be a more subjective unity, our efforts will be expended differently.

One thing for sure—the church is not to be is a great *organizational unity,* for whatever advantages or disadvantages may be involved in massive organizational unity, this in itself obviously does not produce the results Christ prayed for, nor does it solve the church's other great problems. Moreover, it has been tried and found wanting. In the early days of the church there was much vitality and growth but little organizational unity. Later, as the church came to favor under Constantine and his successors, the church increasingly centralized until

during the Middle Ages there was literally one united ecclesiastical body covering all Europe. But was this a great age? Was there a deep unity of faith? Did men and women find themselves increasingly drawn to this faith and come to confess Jesus Christ to be their Savior and Lord (for that is what Christ promised, namely, that if the church were one, men and women would believe on him)? Not at all! On the contrary, the world believed the opposite. Spurgeon once wrote, "The world was persuaded that God had nothing to do with that great crushing, tyrannous, superstitious, ignorant thing which called itself Christianity; and thinking men became infidels, and it was the hardest possible thing to find a genuine intelligent believer north, south, east, or west."

Certainly there is something to be said for some form of outward, visible unity (at least in most situations). But it is equally certain that this type of unity is not what we most need, nor is it that for which the Lord prayed.

Another type of unity that we do not need is *conformity*, that is, an approach to the church that would make everyone alike. Here we probably come closest to the error of the evangelical church, for if the liberal church for the most part strives for an organizational unity—through the various councils of churches, the Consultation on Church Union, denominational mergers, and so forth—the evangelical church for its part seems to strive for an identical pattern of looks and behavior among its members. This is not what Jesus is looking for in this prayer. On the contrary, there should be the greatest diversity among Christians, diversity of personality, interests, lifestyle, and even methods of Christian work and evangelism. This should make the church interesting, not dull. Uniformity is dull, like rows upon rows of Wheaties boxes. Variety is exciting! It is the variety of nature and the character and actions of our God.

But if the unity for which Jesus prayed is not an organizational unity or a unity achieved by conformity, what kind of unity is it? The answer is that it is a unity parallel to the unity that exists within the Godhead; for Jesus speaks of it in these terms—"that all of them may be one, Father,

just as you are in me and I am in you... I in them, and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity" (vv. 21, 23). This means that the church is to have a spiritual unity involving the basic orientation, desires, and will of those participating. Paul points to this true unity in writing to the Corinthians, saying, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men" (1 Cor. 12:4-6).

This is not to say that all believers actually enter into this unity as they should. Otherwise, why would Christ pray for it? The actual case is that, like the other marks of the church already considered, unity is something given to the church but also something for which the body of true believers should strive. There is a sense in which we already are one in Christ. But there is also a sense in which we must achieve that unity.

Brothers and Sisters

Here we are helped by the various images used of the church throughout the New Testament, one of the most valuable being that of the family. Christians belong to the family of God, and therefore they are rightly brothers and sisters of one another.

The unique characteristic of this image is that it speaks of relationships and therefore of the commitments that the individuals must have to one another. The relationships are based upon what God has done. Salvation is described in the verses that use this image as God begetting spiritual children, who are therefore made members of his spiritual family through his choice and not through their own. John even says this explicitly in the preface to his Gospel, when he writes of our having become children of God "not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (1:13). There is a tendency in the world to talk about all men and women as brothers and sisters, but while this is true in a certain humanitarian sense it is nevertheless not what the Bible is talking about when it speaks of Christian brotherhood.

This is something that God has intervened to establish among his own regenerated children.

This fact has two important consequences. First, if the family to which we belong has been established by God, then we have no choice as to who will be in it or whether or not we will be his or her sister or brother. On the contrary, the relationship simply exists, and we must be brotherly to the other Christian, whether we want to be or not.

The second consequence is related to this, simply that we must be committed to each other in tangible ways. We must be committed to helping each other, for example, for we all need help at times, and this is one clear way in which the special bond among believers can be shown to the watching world. A number of years ago I walked into the bathroom in our home and found one of my children sitting on the floor with a large pile of unrolled toilet paper beside her. She had been spinning the roll and watching it pile up in intricate patterned layers as it settled. I took one look at her and said, with a note of astonishment in my voice, "What in the world are you doing?"

"I'm unrolling the toilet paper," she answered. There was no questioning the truthfulness of that.

"Why are you being naughty?" I countered.

She said, "Nobody helps me to be good." I suspect that her answer was a carefully worded excuse (and also not nearly so truthful as her first statement.) But whatever her reasons, the statement did at least point to a true need. We do need help as Christians, and we need it from Christians. Moreover, we must be ready to give help, just as we would to a needy member of our own human family.

A Fellowship

The second important image used to portray the unity of the church of Christ is a fellowship, which the New Testament normally indicates by the Greek word *koinonia*. Unfortunately, neither the word "fellowship" nor the word *koinonia* is very helpful in conveying what we mean. This

is because the English word commonly means only a loose collection of friends, and the Greek word has become something of a theological cliche. Actually, the word has to do with sharing something or having something in common. The common Greek of the New Testament period is called Koine Greek. Partners, as those who hold property in common or share in a business, are *koinonoi*. In spiritual terms *koinonia*, or fellowship, is had by those who share a common Christian experience of the gospel. In this respect the New Testament speaks often of our fellowship with the Father (1 John 1:3), with the Son (1 Cor. 1:9), which is sometimes described as a fellowship in the blood and body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16), and with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). This obviously involves the totality of our experience of God's grace.

But fellowship is not only defined in terms of what we share *in* together. It also involves what we share *out* together. And this means that it must involve a community in which Christians actually share their thoughts and lives with one another.

How is this to be done practically? It will probably be done in different ways in different congregations depending upon local situations and needs. Some churches are small and therefore will have an easier time establishing times of sharing. Here church suppers, work projects, and other such efforts will help. Larger churches will have to break their numbers down into smaller groups in various ways. At Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, which I serve as pastor, we have tried to do this in three ways simultaneously. First, we have tried to divide the congregation according to age levels. Thus we have a fully graded Sunday school, and on the upper levels we have tried to establish groups for college students, postcollege students, young couples, other adult classes, and meetings for senior citizens. Part of this is an adult elective program. Second, we have tried to divide the congregation geographically. Tenth Church members come from a large and scattered metropolitan area. Some of them drive twenty, thirty, or more miles to get there. Midweek meetings at the church are impractical for most. Therefore we have established area Bible studies,

where people can meet weekly with those in their area. They meet to study the Bible, share concerns, and pray together. These area groups are probably the least structured but also the most profitable of all the church activities. Finally, we have also begun to divide the church according to professional interests. In this area there are regular meetings by groups of artists, musicians (we have a chamber orchestra), medical students and nurses, and ministerial candidates and young pastors.

My own experience in this area conforms to that of John R. W. Stott, who experimented with similar groups in his own London parish. He has written on the grounds of his experience, "The value of the small group is that it can become a community of related persons; and in it the benefit of personal relatedness cannot be missed, nor its challenge evaded. ...I do not think it is an exaggeration to say, therefore, that small groups, Christian family or fellowship groups, are indispensable for our growth into spiritual maturity."

Once again, this is an area in which Christian unity can become a visible and practical thing, and its unique and desirable qualities can be made known to the world.

The Body

The third important image used to stress the unity of the church is the body. Clearly, this image has many important connotations. It speaks of the nature of the Christian union—one part of the body simply cannot survive if it is separated from the whole. It speaks of interdependence. It even suggests a kind of subordination involving a diversity of function; for the hand is not the foot, nor the foot the eye, and over all is the head which is Christ. Paul speaks of this in 1 Corinthians saying, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many" (12:12-14).

However, the one function of the body that is unique to this image is service, for just as the family emphasizes relationships, and fellowships emphasizes sharing, so does the body emphasize work. The body exists to do something and, since we are talking about unity, we must stress that it exists to enable us to do this work *together.*

In the book from which I quoted earlier, Stott speaks of this service flowing out of the small groups that his church emphasizes. "It must be admitted that several have been unsuccessful— through lack of time or of enterprise," he writes. "Others, however, have offered their practical services as a group.... Certainly without some such common concern and service, the fellowship of any Christian group is maimed."

Your Part

The question we end with is simply: What is to be your part in this area? What will you do? Obviously you cannot change the whole church, but, as one writer puts it, "You can begin in your own life to be an answer to the high priestly prayer of Christ. You can become a small focus of change." First, you can become aware of that great family, fellowship, and body to which you already belong, and you can thank God for it. Second, you can join a small group, where the reality of Christian unity is most readily seen and experienced. Third, you can work with that group to show forth Christian love and give service. If you are willing to do that, you will find God to be with you, and you will be overwhelmed at the power with which he works both in you and in others whom he will be drawing to faith.

But perhaps you are not a part of that family, the family of God, in the first place. You may be a Baptist, a Presbyterian, a Roman Catholic, a Pentecostal. But you have never been born into God's family. If so, do not let pride of denomination (or of anything else) keep you from the reality of Christianity. Run to Jesus and enter in through him, the only true door.

Chapter 219.
Impartial Love

John 17:23

We pause in our study of the marks of the church presented in John 17 to deal with a most extraordinary sentence. The sentence is the last part of verse 23: "You... have loved them even as you have loved me." It means that God's love for us is in the same measure and is exercised in the same way as his love for Christ. There have been attempts to avoid this meaning, no doubt because it is so tremendous. Some have treated the sentence casually, as though it were saying, "You have loved them *because* you love me." Others have seen it in terms of the mystical union of believers with Christ, as though we are loved as Christ only because we are actually in Christ. These statements are true, but they miss the full force of the sentence because they do not take the key word at full value. That word is *kathōs*, which means "just as" or "to the same degree that." Thus, we are told that God loves those who are Christ's to the same degree and in the same way that he loves Christ.

This is extraordinary, for none of us loves like that, and even though it is true that God can love like that, to claim that he does would be presumptuous and arrogant were it not that he himself tells us so in these verses. Actually our love is quite partial. It is partial in our preference for our friends over against those who are not our friends. It is usually partial in preference for our family over our friends. There is even partiality within the family, for if we were to ask those who are parents about their love for their children, most would admit that while they try to be impartial and in many cases almost succeed in being impartial, nevertheless they do not love each of their children equally. Perhaps it is the grace and accommodating ways of one child in comparison to the other children. It may be the drive and natural ability of another child. It may be some other characteristic. Something causes us to love the one slightly more than the other or at least be more naturally drawn toward that one. But God, we are told, has no favorites

and thus loves us with the same love that he loves his own Son. God does not love one of his children more than he loves the others.

The Scope of God's Love

We see the nature of this in the love of the Father for Jesus. So we naturally turn to it and ask, "But what is this love like? What is the scope of the Father's love for Jesus?"

The first answer to this question is that God's love is *infinite*. God is infinite; therefore, he is infinite in this as in all his other attributes. This means that there are no limits on God's love. We always have limits, even though we sometimes pretend we do not. In *A Place for You* by the Swiss psychologist Paul Tournier, I came across a story from the experience of Tournier that is helpful in this area. A woman had come to see him for the first time. She had hesitated for several years before coming, but she had come at last. Now the time had come for her to leave. Her home was far away, and it would be some time before she could come again. She stood at the door obviously reluctant to go. After a pause she asked, "Can I at any rate write to you?" "Of course,"

Tournier answered.

There was a further silence. Then she said, "May I write often?"

Tournier's response was, "There is no limit!" The Swiss psychologist indicates that as he said this he spoke in a somewhat extravagant tone as if to indicate that, although he would certainly do everything in his power to help this patient, he was aware (as she was also) that he did have limits and that no one but God could actually provide this limitless support.

But God does supply it. This is Tournier's point and the point of Christ's statement in his high priestly prayer. Can we imagine any limits on the Father's love for the Lord Jesus Christ? Can we imagine him saying, "Well, it is true that I love you, but after all there are limits upon everything and at this particular point even I must draw the line"? Can we picture him saying, "I'll help later, but don't bother me now; I'm

busy"? Of course not! No limits are to be placed upon the Father's love for the Son or upon the love of the Son for the Father. So then, in precisely the same way, no limits are to be placed upon the Father's love for us. We can go to him at any time with any need and know that he stands as ready to help us as he did to help the Lord Jesus Christ in Gethsemane. He is as close to us as to Jesus, whether or not we know it or feel it practically.

Second, the love of the Father for the Lord Jesus Christ is *eternal* which is, we must note, not the same thing as being infinite. An infinite love is, as we said, a love without limits. An eternal love is a love without end. Can we think of the Father ceasing to love Jesus Christ, his beloved? Can we think of the infinite affection that existed between the first and second persons of the Godhead from eternity past up to and including the present time suddenly ceasing? Far better to imagine the dissolution of the universe we know, far better to say as did Othello, "Chaos is come again," than to imagine such an impossible possibility. God's love for Christ will not cease. Therefore, his love for us will not cease. It will not cease because of changes in him, for he does not change: "I am the LORD, I do not change" (Mal. 3:6). It will not cease because of changes in us, for God has foreseen all change. Indeed, he has ordained that the overriding and ultimately prevailing change shall be, not our conformity to sin, but rather our conformity to the image of his own dear Son: "For those God foreknow, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29).

The consequence of this is that nothing, not even sin, can separate us from God's love. As the passage in Romans goes on to say, "Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (8:38-39).

The third characteristic of the love of God the Father for Christ is perfection. His is a *perfect* love. Consequently, his love for us is perfection as well. We do not love perfectly, as we well know. That is

why marriages break up, friendships dissolve, children so often rebel against parental authority. It is not always that we cease to love. It is rather that we do not love well. We overindulge, or we do not give of ourselves, or we act inconsistently. Sometimes we spoil a child through love; we give him or her too much. Sometimes we do not give enough; so the child spends a lifetime trying to find what he should have found at home but did not get there. Again, we say we will do something, but then we fail to do it. This is the nature of our love, but it is not the nature of God's love. He loves perfectly with a wisdom and consistency that has only our best at heart.

If we believe that—if we believe that God loves us with the same perfection of love he has shown to Jesus Christ—then we will not be gripers because plans do not turn out the way we would like them to. We will not be despondent because of some undesirable circumstances. On the contrary, we will be encouraged, knowing that indeed "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

Does God So Love?

Is it really the case that God loves us like this? Can we really believe that we are loved with that same infinite, eternal, and perfect love with which God the Father loves the Lord Jesus Christ? Is there evidence that we are really beneficiaries of so great a love?

The answer, as any Christian knows, is yes. And the proof of it is not some abstract reasoning in regard to God's nature, but rather the historical manifestation of God's love at Calvary. How do we know that God loves us with such a great love? John 3:16 gives the answer, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." We know that God loves with the greatest of all loves because of the supreme gift of his Son to die for us on Calvary. I have frequently said that it is almost impossible to find a verse in the Bible that speaks of God's love without finding that it also speaks (in the context, if not in the very verse itself) of the proof of that love by Christ's death for us. Galatians 2:20—"I

have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." First John 4:10—"This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

How do we know that God loves us? We know because God sent Jesus; and the reason God sent him is that he might die for us. It is on this basis that God even commends his love to us. For "God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

Security

At this point we must turn to the consequences of such love. What are they? First and most important, such love gives us great security. Love should always give security, a security that is either greater or less depending upon the quality of the love supporting it. Husbands need support from their wives. Wives need support from their husbands. Children obviously need the support of their parents. But often this security is lacking because the love that should support it is lacking. Insecurity results.

By contrast, we have great security in God's love. For one thing, we have security as we look toward the future, to the day of judgment. This, I am convinced, is the meaning of that exceedingly simple (but often puzzling) statement in 1 John 4:17—"In this world we are like him." So far as words go, the sentence could hardly be simpler. It is composed of only seven words. All are monosyllables—"In this world we are like him." But what does this mean? Does it involve obligation, as though it said, "In this world we *ought to belike* him"? Can it refer to the future, as though it could mean, *"We will belike* him when we depart from this world"? No, it obviously refers to life now. Can it refer to some actual moral perfection? The answer is that it refers to our stance before God in view of the final judgment, for that is what is being talked about in the context. The verse reads, "In this way, love is made

complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him (v. 18).

Because of the identity of the love of God for Christ and the love of God for me, my relationship to the final judgment is the same as his. Will Jesus be judged? Will he be forced to give an account of the sins laid upon him as he hung upon the cross? Of course not! He bore our sins in order that they might be judged once for all and be removed from him and us forever. Then we shall not be judged for those sins either. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

But perhaps you are thinking that this is all a bit too remote. It refers to future events, to the events of God's judgment, and what you are concerned about is life now. Is there security now because of God's love? Yes, there is, in precisely the same sense that there is security for a child in a parent's love, though the child may grow up and move far from home. Or, to give an illustration, it is the security of a seaman who fixes his course by the North Star, knowing that this star, in contrast to all other stars, is not variable. One hymn writer wrote:

> O love of God, our shield and stay
> Through all the perils of our way!
> Eternal love, in thee we rest, For ever safe, for ever blest.

Tournier had been counseling a woman who had come back, after a period of several weeks, around the Christmas holidays. "The nail has held," she said as she came in.

"What nail?" asked the Swiss doctor.

"The nail I am hanging on," she explained. "I feel like a picture hanging on a wall. If the nail comes out, the picture falls. My nail was this appointment that you gave me for just after my holidays." The holidays,

as Tournier knew, were always difficult times for her. She always approached them in fear that they would be times in which her problems would emerge once more. So she said, "All the time during the holidays I have been watching the nail so as to hold on, and everything went all right." She added, "I don't feel at all that I am hanging on you emotionally; I hang on you existentially."

The love of God is that upon which we can hang. Indeed, we can hang upon it existentially and emotionally and in every other way as well, knowing that it will not budge, even though the wall and everything else in heaven and earth should be shaken. I will be even more graphic. That nail is the nail (or nails) placed through the hands of Christ on the cross; for they are the proof of God's love, the only fixed point in a revolving and chaotic universe.

Love for Others

There is one more consequence of the truth that God loves us as he loves his Son. It is that we should love others and that we should love them, as best we can, impartially. We must not pick whom we will love for Christ's sake. We must not love with an angle. We are not infinite. We will not be able to love everyone with an inexhaustible love. We will not love perfectly. But, God helping us, we can love impartially in the sense that we can love the unlovely for Jesus' sake.

I have been amused by a story along these lines told by Ralph Keiper. Keiper had become a Christian in his senior year of high school, in part through 2 Corinthians 5:17, which says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come!" Having become a new creature he immediately began meditating on the second half of the verse, which says, "the old is gone," because he had a problem in the person of his geometry teacher and sincerely wished that *she* would pass away, which she did not. He says, "She was a witch, the kind of person to whom on Halloween you would give a broom and say, 'This is your night, kid; do your stuff!'" At last the problem drove him to its solution, because he recognized that the new creature of the verse was to be himself and not his teacher, and that the things which were to pass away were his own old attitudes. Recognizing that he was to be like

Jesus Christ, he came to the conclusion that if God could endure his teacher then perhaps he could too. He could even love her for Christ's sake. With this attitude he not only finished the course; he even went on to study trigonometry.

God has loved us greatly even as he has loved Christ. But the matter does not stop at that point. It is not meant to. True, the Father has loved us as he loves Christ, but he has loved us so that, as one result, we might love as Christ. If we do, we will become one among ourselves and then by God's grace also win those for whom Christ also died.

Chapter 220.
With Jesus Forever

John 17:24

I once talked to a Christian woman who was dying. She had cancer, which by then had spread throughout her body, and as she talked to me about her condition she described her physical state as "sinking." She was sinking physically. But as we spoke of spiritual things we reminded ourselves that such sinking, though painful and difficult, is actually ascending into the presence of God.

I was reminded of a paragraph I had recently read in *Blind Ambition*, John Dean's book on his White House years, for it made a great contrast. Dean had written of his rise to positions of increasingly greater prestige and power in the White House, but he pointed out that, unknown to him at the time, it was actually a descent to corruption and eventual crimes. He wrote, "I soon learned that to make my way upward, into a position of confidence and influence, I had to travel downward through factional power plays, corruption and finally outright crimes. Although I would be rewarded for diligence, true advancement would come from doing those things which built a common bond of trust—or guilt—between me and my superiors. In the Nixon White House, these upward and downward paths diverged, yet

joined, like prongs of a tuning fork pitched to a note of expediency. Slowly, steadily, I would climb toward the moral abyss of the President's inner circle until I finally fell into it, thinking I had made it to the top just as I began to realize I had actually touched bottom."

In this assessment of his political career, Dean was not talking about death, but he might well have been; for what he was describing in regard to political or secular morals is true as well of every part of a life that is not linked to God. Millions spend a lifetime striving to arrive at positions of great influence and power, only to find that everything they have worked for is taken away by death. By contrast, a Christian may actually bury himself or herself in God's service, having no outward earthly rewards, and in the end pass through death in obscurity. Yet that burial is actually a resurrection. And that sinking is actually an ascension into the presence of the Lord of life forever.

Triumph, Not Tragedy

Why is the experience of a Christian so different from that of a non-Christian at this point? It is not because of something meritorious in the Christian, of course. Still less is it due to some intrinsic change in him. The difference is to be found only in the will of God, who has decreed that the death of a Christian shall not be a tragedy, but a triumph.

This is declared many places in Scripture, as anyone who knows the Bible well is aware. Paul spoke of his willingness "to be away from the body and [thus] at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). He called death "gain" (Phil. 1:21). He shared his indecision as to whether he most wanted to remain on earth to serve other believers or "to depart and to be with Christ, which is better by far" (Phil. 1:23). In Romans he wrote of nothing being able to separate us from God's love (Rom. 8:35-39). In the Old Testament Job spoke with this confidence, saying, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another" (Job 19:25-27). John 17 moves in this same sphere of triumph, for in it Jesus declares his will that all who have been given to him by

the Father be with him in glory after both his and their passage through this life: "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world" (v. 24).

Here then is an important fact. The triumph of a believer in death is often spoken of in Scripture. But in this verse it receives, as it were, its only proper foundation and true emphasis. Its foundation is seen in that it is based on the express will of God the Son and God the Father (for their wills are one). Its emphasis is seen in that this is the last of Jesus' great petitions to the Father just before his crucifixion. The last thing he asks—indeed, the last thing he wills—is that we might be with him where he is.

Where Jesus Is

Let us think about where Jesus is. Can there be doubt about Christ's meaning? I hardly think so; yet there may be in some minds, due to the fact that he speaks in the present tense ("where I am") rather than in the future ("where I will be"), which we would use if we were thinking of heaven. Does he mean "where I am now," that is, in the upper room or on the outskirts of Jerusalem on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane —depending upon where one imagines this prayer to have been given? No, because if this were the case, there would be no need for Christ so to pray; the disciples were already with him. Besides, in this section of the prayer he is thinking, not just of the disciples, but also of those who would later believe on him through their witness.

So Jesus is not thinking of where he then was but of where he was soon to be, and he is thinking in such confident terms that he actually uses the present tense to express this confidence. In other words, he is so certain that he is soon to be once again in heaven with the Father that he speaks as though it has already occurred, just as he also does in verse 11, where he prays, "I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you." Clearly, in both these verses he means that he is about to leave this world and thereby return to glory.

That is precisely where Christ is at this moment. How do we know? We know because of his own statements, of course. But in addition to that we have the fact of the ascension, witnessed by the disciples and testified to by the angels—"Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). We also have the visions of Christ in glory—seen by Stephen (recorded in Acts 7) and by John (recorded in Revelation).

Of all the pictures of heaven given to us in the Bible, I like the picture in the fifth chapter of
Revelation best. However, I know as I read it that the words obviously do not convey the full glory of that place. They talk about a throne upon which God the Father is seated. They speak of the Son, described as a Lamb. There are angels and elders and an additional great host, all of whom are engaged in singing the praises of Jesus Christ. There are harps and bowls of incense. There is a scroll of prophecy that no one but the Son of God can open. But these are images designed to portray something beyond our wildest imagination. Or again, even if they are meant to be literal, they still obviously do not convey the full glory of heaven.

Are we poorer on that account? We may think so, but that is not the impression this great chapter and the other chapters that speak of heaven leave with us. On the contrary, they are rich and reassuring. And the reason they are is that they focus rightly on the most important thing about heaven, namely, upon the fact that God the Father and God the Son are there.

This is the focal point of Revelation 5. It is true that it speaks of the three groups of beings I mentioned earlier: the four and twenty elders, the angels, and a vast host of other creatures from everywhere in the universe. But these are brought forward, not to give us a description of them, but because each of these is bearing a testimony to Christ and thus serves to show how he is prominent. The four and twenty elders praise him. Their praise is this song: "You are worthy to take the scroll

and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (vv. 9-10). Then the angels give their testimony. They say, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise" (v. 12). At last the remaining creatures join in: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever" (v. 13). Heaven is where God is, and it is his presence (and not some high concentration of golden streets or jewels) that makes it heaven.

Do you know that? Do your children know it? My six-year-old daughter was in a first-grade science class. They were discussing the universe—how big it is and of what it is composed. Do you know what the conversation of these six-year-old children drifted around to? Heaven! They wanted to know where heaven fit in. Was it between the stars? Was it beyond them? The only valid answer and the one we gave when our daughter came home and told this to us is that heaven is where God is. It is this that makes it heaven.

Where We Shall Be

So the first thing we note about this particular text is that Jesus is now in heaven in the presence of the Father. It is what he means by "where I am." We must also note that this is where we shall be, if we have truly been given to him. This is the major point of the verse, for Jesus mentions his departure to heaven only to say that it is his desire that we join him there after our work here has been completed.

This is what makes heaven real to us, too, and it is what makes it a comfort. One of the Bible personages who had a vision of heaven was the apostle Paul. He describes it obliquely at one point, using the third person as though he were describing the experience of someone else, but there is little doubt that he is speaking of himself. He says, "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—

God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell" (2 Cor. 12:2-4). Here is a man who saw heaven and who could have described it for us. But he does not, for as Paul comes to speak of death later, as he does in Philippians and in some other books, it is always the presence of Christ in heaven that overshadows these other matters and is his comfort.

We shall be with Jesus! That is the promise and the glory. It is what should fill our minds as we think of the life to come.

It is also the thing that should fill our speech as we talk with dying people or with those who have lost a loved one. Most of us do not have great contact with death, because our culture has devised ways to isolate most of us from this reality. But pastors face it many times each year through the experience of those in their congregations. Here is one dying from cancer. The body is wasting away; so the evidence of approaching death is immediately evident to anyone who enters the dying person's room. It is evident to the person himself. What comfort is there? You cannot say, "You are certainly looking better this morning," because it is not true; and even if it were, it would only be temporary. You cannot bring comfort by asking how the person feels. He is in great pain. Where is the comfort? Only here: in knowing that the dying one will soon be with Jesus and that (before long) we too will be there and will be reunited with our friend.

Take another case. A child has died, and you are going to visit the family. The loss is great beyond measure. The family is in a near state of shock. What can you say? The only comfort is that the child is now with Jesus, having completed that span of life to which God called it, and that we will see the child again one day, at the moment of our own homegoing.

Several years ago, when I had been speaking on death, someone sent me a newspaper clipping containing excerpts from the writing of Pearl Buck, who had died just a few months before. Not having the

Christian's hope, she had approached death, not in the comfort and assurance of the believer in Jesus Christ, but in the resignation of the Eastern mystics. She had written, "There are times in sleepless nights when I ponder upon this planet to which we cling. I meditate upon how utterly lost we are in space. We bear the total isolation as we must, for however we may hope there is a God we do not hear his voice and we do not see him and, while faith is a valid emotion, it is not confirmed except through hope" (*The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 7, 1973). I would

> maintain that the Christian faith is confirmed twice over: first, objectively by Christ's resurrection and ascension, and second, subjectively by the application of these truths to our minds and consciences by the Holy Spirit. Most important, it is this that gives comfort as we contemplate our own passage from this life into eternity.

Like Jesus

I said that the only comfort in death is to know that we will soon be with Jesus. But while it is true that this is the great and only ultimate comfort, I am not sure that this statement is entirely true, for there is at least one other fact that is comforting. The additional fact is that we will not only be with Jesus, we will also be like him. John writes in his first letter, "We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

There are many ways in which we shall be like him. We shall be like him in respect to his character, for in that day all the sin, ignorance, and folly that characterize our lives here will be gone. We will be like him in love, holiness, knowledge, wisdom, truth, mercy, and all his other attributes. Then again, we shall be like him in respect to his body, for we shall receive a resurrection body patterned after his own.

I think this is what was in Paul's mind as he wrote those important words on death that are recorded in 2 Corinthians 4 and 5. There is an unfortunate chapter break in this passage, as there is also occasionally at other points of the New Testament. But if we begin reading with verse

15 of chapter 4 and continue through verse 4 of chapter 5, we will receive the full meaning of the apostle. "All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (2 Cor. 4:15-5:4).

As I read this I sense that Paul was not in good health and that he was, moreover, speaking from a sense of real pain. A chapter later he is to speak of the physical trials he had endured in Christ's service—beatings, imprisonments, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, hunger (6:5). In chapter 11 he will detail this suffering yet further—"Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked" (vv. 2427). These sufferings were not imaginary for Paul. They were real perils. Luke describes many of them explicitly in the Book of Acts. These had certainly left their toll on Paul. So it may well have been as a nearly broken man that he wrote 2 Corinthians.

But what does he say? Does he complain? Does he bemoan his suffering? No. Rather, he looks beyond it, admitting that although our body is in a state of decline and although physical groans are wrung from us through our suffering, yet we still look up, knowing that a new body awaits us and in that body we will soon stand face-to-face before Jesus. It is after this moving acknowledgment of the problem and its solution that he says convincingly, "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (5:8).

Like Jesus Now

There are some for whom these words are already meaningful. They are old or sick, some close to dying. The thought of being with Jesus forever and being like him is itself a great blessing. On the other hand, there are others who are not in this position and for whom this study therefore does not seem timely. What of these? I could point out that we are all dying, some only nearer to that point than others. Again, I could point out that no one knows the moment of his or her death.

It could be thirty years from now; it could be tomorrow or tonight. Instead of this, let me make an application in two other areas.

First, if it is true that you will eventually be with Jesus, if you are a Christian, then why not spend time with him now? This you may do through times of your own personal Bible study and prayer. What would we think of a couple who are about to be married but who do not seem to feel the need to spend time together before the marriage? They say, "Oh, we will be together a lot after we are married; we have other things we want to do now." We would think that a marriage like that would hardly be promising, and we would be right, for if a couple is going to spend their lives together, they should rightly want to get to know one another better even before the marriage ceremony. In the same way, we should want to get to know Jesus better if we are indeed looking forward to being together with him in heaven one day.

The second application is to our moral conduct. If we are going to be like Jesus one day, as John tells us so clearly in his first epistle (1 John 3:2), then why not strive to be like him now? This is John's own

conclusion, for having said that we will be like him in glory, he immediately adds, "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (v.3).

Each winter for many years, after the pressures of the Christmas and New Year's services at
Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, my family and I took a four-day vacation in the Pocono mountains in eastern Pennsylvania. The place where we vacationed is an immense lodge, beautifully situated on a large mountain estate. We looked forward to this greatly as the vacation days approached each winter. Thinking of it actually helped us do our work better. When the time eventually came that we were to make the trip, we started off, drove for about three hours, and then arrived normally in the evening as dusk was settling over the mountain landscape. We parked, approached the door, and as we went in, the magnificent doormen, some of whom had been there for twenty or thirty years, came up to greet us and take our bags. And they said—this is the point for which I tell the story—"Welcome home! Welcome home!" Well, it was not home (unfortunately). It is only a clever device on the part of the lodge to make its guests welcome. But one day we are going to glory where those words will be rightly spoken by no other than our own blessed Lord, the One who has himself prepared our rooms for us. "Welcome home!" he will say. And we really will be home—forever.

Anyone who has this hope in him will try to be like Christ now, and he will work faithfully in Christ's service.

Chapter 221.
The Sixth Mark of the Church: Love

John 17:25-26

What is the greatest mark of the church? I do not mean by this: What is the first mark of the church, or even, What is the mark that we perhaps

most lack? Joy is the first mark mentioned, and the mark most lacking is something that has to be answered differently in different periods of history and in different situations. I mean: What is the greatest mark, the one that holds the

others together? What is the one that gives meaning to the others, the one without which the church cannot at all be what God means it to be? There is only one answer. The greatest mark of the church is love.

Paul talks about this in 1 Corinthians 13. After having spoken about love in that chapter and having come to the end in which he looks at the Christian life under the categories of faith, hope, and love—faith that looks back to the cross, hope that looks forward to the Lord's second coming, and love that looks about at the world and other Christians—Paul concludes that while all three are great and abiding virtues, nevertheless "the greatest of these is love."

It is with the same thought in mind that the Lord Jesus Christ, having spoken of joy, holiness, truth, mission, and unity as essential marks of the church in his high priestly prayer of John 17, nevertheless concludes by an emphasis upon love. It is the new commandment of 13:34-35 once again—"Love one another. As I have loved you, you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Here Jesus says that he has declared the name of God to the disciples in order that "the love you have for me may be in them, and that I myself may be in them" (17:26).

When Love Is Gone

We see the preeminence of love readily if we look at it in reference to the other marks of the church. What happens when you take love away from them? Suppose you take joy and subtract love from it? What do you have? You have hedonism. You have an exuberance in life and its pleasures, but without the sanctifying joy found in relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Subtract love from holiness. What do you get? You get self-righteousness, the kind of virtue that characterized the Pharisees of

Christ's day. By the standards of the day the Pharisees lived very holy lives, but they did not love others and were ready to kill Christ when he challenged their standards, and actually did kill him. They were hypocrites.

Take love from truth, and you have a bitter orthodoxy, the kind of teaching that is right but that does not win anyone.

Take love from mission, and you have imperialism. It is colonialism in ecclesiastical garb. We have seen much of that in recent history.

Take love from unity, and you soon have tyranny. This develops in a hierarchical church where there is no compassion for people nor a desire to involve them in the decision-making process.

That is one side of it. On the other hand, express love in relation to God and man and what do you find? You find all the other marks of the church following. What does love for God the Father lead to? Joy! Because we rejoice in God and in what he has so overwhelmingly done for us. What does love for the Lord Jesus Christ lead to? Holiness! Because we know that we will see him one day and will be like him; therefore "everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). What does love for the Word of God lead to? Truth! Because if we love the Word, we will study it and therefore inevitably grow into a fuller appreciation and realization of God's truth. What does love for the world lead to? Mission! We have a message to take to the world. Again, where does love for our Christian brothers and sisters lead us? To unity! Because by love we discern that we are bound together in that bundle of life that God himself has created within the Christian community.

Is it any wonder that Jesus ends his final discourses and prayer (undoubtedly spoken within the hearing of the disciples) with this emphasis? Hardly! Rather, we expect it, for it is as though Jesus, in anticipation of the writing of the fourth Gospel, could go back to the beginning of this fourth section (where we read, "Having loved his own who were in the world, he showed them the full extent of his love") and

then conclude, "Yes, and here at the very end of my discourses and prayer I am going to talk about precisely that, for love is the most important characteristic."

Love's Source

What can we say about love on the basis of these verses? First, we can say that it has its source in God. This is the kind of love we are talking about. We are not talking about the kind of love the world invents, aspires to or imagines, but rather the love of God that is revealed in Jesus Christ and that we come to know as we come to know God. It is obvious that Jesus has precisely this thought in mind, because verse 25, the prelude to verse 26, talks about knowledge. In it Jesus says, "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me." It is after this that Jesus goes on to say, "I have made you known to them [that is, I have made you known in your essential nature], and will continue to make you known *in order that* the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." What Jesus is saying is that, if we know God, we will know God's nature as being characterized by love and that, if we do not know love, we do not know God. John later clearly makes the same point in his first epistle (1 John 4:7-8).

When Jesus says the world has not known God, he means, besides everything else, that the world does not know God as a God of love. This was demonstrably true in Jesus' day. No Greek, no Roman, no Egyptian, no Babylonian in Christ's day, or in any of the centuries before, had ever thought of God's nature as being essentially characterized by love. It is just not there. Read all the ancient documents, and you simply do not find this element. At best, God was thought to be impartial. Or, if one chose to think optimistically, God could sometimes be said to love those who love him; meaning that he might be favorable to them for their service. But this is a tit-fortat arrangement (you serve me, and I will take care of you), not the benevolent, unmerited love of God disclosed in the Bible. It simply

does not exist in antiquity, apart from a preparatory form within the pages of the Old Testament.

With the Lord Jesus Christ an entirely new idea entered history, for he taught, not only that God is loving, but also that he loves with an extraordinary love, entirely beyond all human imaginations. That love had sent Christ to die. Moreover, on that basis it would now draw a host of redeemed men and women into an extraordinary family relationship with God.

It may be seen linguistically that a new understanding of love entered history through God's revelation, first in the Old Testament and then preeminently through the teaching of Jesus Christ. To begin with, we note that the Greek language, in which the New Testament is written and into which the Old Testament was translated about one hundred years before Christ's birth, is rich in words for love. Yet when the translators of the Old Testament and the writers of the New came to talk about the love of God, they found that they could not draw upon any of the common Greek words for "love," but instead had to choose a word that previously had been little used and change it, thereby infusing it with an entirely new character.

French has only one word for love, *aimer*. A Frenchman uses it for whatever he wants to say. He loves his wife; he loves his country; he loves his house; he loves his bouillabaisse and crepes suzette, anything, in fact, for which he has the slightest liking. The English language is a little better; we have "love" and "like."

French has one word. English has two words. But ancient Greek had three words, plus this indefinite word that could hardly be used for love at all. The first word was *storge*. It referred to general affection, particularly within the family. The closest English equivalent would be "fondness." The Greek would say, "I am *fond* of my children and my relatives." The second Greek word is *philia* from which we get the English words "philanthropy" and "Philadelphia." It refers to friendship. Jesus used this word when he said the person "who loves father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). The third

Greek word is *eros,* the word for sensual love. From it we get our English word "erotic."

When the translators of the Hebrew Bible came to put the Old Testament texts into Greek, none of these common words was adequate for conveying the biblical conceptions. The translators of the Septuagint might have used *storge*, the word for family affection; but how could they then have conveyed the idea of graciousness that is inherent in God's love? We like things because they commend themselves to us, but God commends his love toward men while they are yet sinners. Again, the translators might have used *eros,* noting that God's love for Israel is portrayed as sexual love in Hosea and in the Song of Solomon. However, this translation would have introduced the idea of an unrighteous love, for *eros* was associated as much with prostitution as with a proper love in marriage. *Eros* had almost no moral content. In a similar way, *philia* was also inadequate, for friendships come and go, but the love of God is eternal. God told Jeremiah, "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3).

What were the translators to do? The answer was simple. The translators took another word entirely, one without strong associations, and used it in nearly all cases where the love of God is mentioned. By doing this they created a word that came in time to convey the type of love they wanted.

At this point let me interject an illustration to show how this also happened in the New Testament period. When Jesus appeared in Israel announcing his mission, he avoided a number of messianic titles. The people were expecting the Messiah. But Jesus did not proclaim himself the Messiah, at least not openly, for to the Jews that would have meant a king strong enough to drive out the Romans. The title "Messiah" would have meant an earthly king and would have suggested an earthly kingdom. Nor did he call himself the Son of God. The Greeks knew all about "sons of god," but that title would have put him on the same level with Hercules or Alexander the Great. Instead Jesus called himself the Son of man. This title occurs in Daniel and describes a messianic figure. But in the intellectual climate of Jesus' time it was no longer precise and

could have meant almost anything. Hence, Jesus used that title more than any other, allowing his teaching and ministry to paint a proper picture of himself as God's true Messiah and Son— the One who came to die, rise again, and return one day in glory to judge mankind and reward those who have believed on him.

It is the same with the several words for "love." Neither *storge*, nor *philia*, nor *eros* conveys the proper biblical ideas. But *agape* could. It was vague, but it could be made to convey the right ideas. Does God love with a righteous, holy love? Yes. That love is *agape*. Is God's love gracious, sovereign, everlasting? Yes, that too. That love is *agape*. By this means *agape* became the supreme word for speaking about God's love, a new love revealed initially by God through Judaism and then disclosed in its fullness in Jesus Christ through biblical Christianity.

By Revelation

This leads to a second point, the revelation itself. We ask: Where does the revelation of God's love occur? Again, it is a somewhat complicated answer. Certainly God had revealed himself to be a God of love in the pages of the Old Testament. God indicated there that he had set his love upon Israel even though there was nothing in the people to merit it. Again, God is revealed to be a God of love in Christ's teaching. He called him Father, indicating that his was a father's love. All that is true. Yet the best truth is that God is declared to be a God of love by the cross of Jesus Christ. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

This is what Jesus is looking forward to in the words that close his prayer, for he says, "I will declare it," meaning the name of God. What is he thinking of here? We could understand the phrase if it had occurred in the past tense, for it would then clearly refer to the previous teaching in the Gospel. But why the future tense? What is Jesus thinking about? It must be the cross itself, for it is as though Jesus is saying, "That which I have been speaking of in years past I am now

going to demonstrate in a dramatic and tangible way through my crucifixion."

There has never been—there never will be—a greater demonstration of the love of God. So if you will not have the Cross, if you will not see God speaking in love in Jesus Christ, you will never find a loving God anywhere. The God of the Bible is going to be a silent God for you. The universe is going to be an empty universe. History is going to be meaningless. It is only at the cross that you will ever find God in his true nature and learn that these other things have meaning.

Love in Action

There is something else in this text, for Jesus does not merely show where we can find love. He also shows where we can demonstrate love, for he goes on to pray that "the love you have for me may be *in them,* and that I myself may be *in them*. "Love is to be shown in us personally.

Why is Jesus concerned about this? I am sure he is concerned about this simply because it is only in his followers that anyone in this age, or any other age save his own, can see this great love. Jesus was aware that he was about to die. Following his death, there would be a resurrection and an ascension into heaven. Therefore, this One who was himself the perfect manifestation of love, the only one in whom this world had ever seen what true love really is—this one would be gone. He would not be here for men and women to contemplate. So he says as he closes his prayer that this love is now to be in us, even as he is in us, and that the world is to see it there. It must be love in action.

A Practical Question

As we draw to the end of this volume (and this section of John's Gospel) a person may be saying, "But I have a practical question. I can see the importance of love, as you have outlined it. I recognize that if we leave love out of the equation for Christian living, we have distorted it all. I can even understand the doctrinal points: that love comes from God, that love is demonstrated at the cross, that it must be seen in

Christian people. But how do we do it? That is the most important question. How do we love one another? How do we put this great love of God into practice?" Let me share a few practical ways.

First, we need to love one another by *listening* to one another. We live in an age in which people do not listen to each other. We talk to one another, and others are constantly talking to us. But this is a hard world in which no one really listens. So one of the things we need to do, if we are truly characterized by the love of God, is to listen. God listens to us.

I saw a movie in which the dominant male character and the dominant female character were talking to one another. The man was older. He was a product of his generation. The woman was younger; she had grown up with television and was so much the passive product of the television age that she was unable to relate deeply to anyone. She was unable to listen. In this scene they were talking together, and the woman said something like, "What do you want from me?"

He answered, "I want you to love me."

This demand was something she could not cope with and did not really understand. She said, "I do not know how to do that." Then they stood staring at each other, and as they did, one became increasingly aware of how fragile their relationship was and that there was ultimately nothing to hold them together. Finally, the telephone rang. What would happen now? Could the girl transcend the interruption and deal with the pressing personal matter? For a moment she seemed to try. But then, while still facing him, her eyes darted sideways to the telephone and the moment to listen was gone. After this the scene dissolved, because the glance told it all. She could not listen.

Here is another story told by theologian Carl F. H. Henry. On one occasion in his travels he was seated in a diner at breakfast time next to a family who had a small boy. The waitress came to their table and began taking the order from the boy. "What will you have for breakfast?" she asked.

He said, "I'll have a hamburger and french fries with lots of ketchup."

"Oh, no, you won't," his mother said. "You'll have a scrambled egg and toast."

That seemed to settle the matter, so the waitress went on to take the other orders. But when she was done she turned back to the boy and said, "I guess it's going to be a scrambled egg and toast." He nodded. Then she said, "But with lots of ketchup!"

After the waitress had gone to the kitchen the boy exclaimed, "I like that waitress; she thinks I'm real." He liked her because she had listened to him and had learned what he had to say. So should we, if we really love one another.

Second, we should *share.* That is, we should let others share, and we ourselves should share. We are not to be like some professional counselors, listening but never interjecting ourselves. We are brothers and sisters in the Lord. We have a family relationship. So we do not sit like computers, analyzing what we are told and then coming back with answers carefully based upon social science surveys. We come back as people who are on the same level as the ones to whom we are talking, and we say, "Yes, I've gone through that. God has done this and this for me."

Our problem at this point is that we do not like to share ourselves. And the reason we do not like to share ourselves is, if we put it frankly, that we are ashamed of ourselves because we are sinners and are afraid that if we really did tell what is down inside, the other person would turn away and be disgusted. We would lose the relationship. How do we get to the point of being able really to share? There is only one way, and that is to know deep in our hearts that before God we are fully known as we are, with all our blemishes, sins and shames, and that, nevertheless, Jesus Christ has loved us, died for us, and that we are now fully accepted in the beloved. If you can know that you are known and yet loved, then you can share your true self and love others.

Third, we must *serve*. We must listen, share, and serve. If anything has been taught in this section of the Gospel, it is that we must serve. The section began with a reference to service as the outworking of Christ's love: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he showed them the full extent of his love" (13:1). In the thirteenth chapter it contained a demonstration of what this love means in the washing of the disciples' feet. Jesus concluded, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet" (13:14). Later Jesus goes on to teach what this love means and what the Holy Spirit will do in enabling us to love. Finally, in this prayer, he lists the special marks that should characterize the church in every age: joy, holiness, truth, unity, mission, and love. The last of these involve service.

And quite rightly! For the Christian church is not in the world to be served; she is in the world to serve in order that the love of God in Christ might be increasingly known through the testimonies and specific loving acts of Christian people.

The Gospel of John, Volume 5

Triumph through Tragedy (John 18-21)

by

James Montgomery Boice

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To him who loved us
and washed us from our sins in his own blood

Preface

From a human viewpoint, the path of John's Gospel has been downhill. An initial appearance of Jesus of Nazareth as the light of this world and a time of popularity have been followed by progressively increasing indifference and rejection on the part of the masses and the intense hatred and open opposition of the religious leaders. Now the story reaches its very nadir as the indifference of the people and the hatred of the leaders combine to have Christ crucified. Yet the low point is also the peak; for in the wisdom and purpose of God the tragedy of the cross is a triumph since it is this that provides an atonement for sins and makes salvation possible. Moreover, it is followed by the resurrection.

This is the message of this fifth and last volume of expositional commentaries of John's Gospel. But it is not just the message of Christ's triumph. It is an indication of how we can triumph as well. In God's plan and in accordance with God's wisdom, even the worst of that which befalls Christians can be transformed into victory.

It has been my pattern in previous volumes to deviate at times from a strict verse-by-verse exposition in order to consider more thoroughly a subject introduced by the exposition. There have been extended discussions of witnessing, baptism, the Sunday-versus-Sabbath question, the Scriptures, Christ our Good Shepherd, death, heaven, the Holy Spirit, and the marks of the church. Two subjects have been treated this way in this volume. The first is the two-part trial of Jesus before the Jewish and Roman authorities. Four studies have been devoted to the Jewish trial (chapters 5-8), and the greater part of twelve studies have been devoted to the trial before Pilate and Herod (chapters 10-21). The second theme is the atonement. The nature, necessity,

perfection, and scope of the atonement are considered in chapters 27-30.

For the benefit of those who have purchased the preceding volumes I can point out that the outline introduced earlier is now completed. Volume 1 deals with the coming of the light of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world (chapters 1-4). Volume 2 covers the growth of hostility toward Jesus on the part of the religious leaders (chapters 5-8). Volume 3 deals with the actions of Jesus in beginning to call out a people to himself from among Israel, beginning with the healing and call of the man who had been born blind (chapters 9-12). Volume 4 contains Christ's final discourses (chapters 13-17). The present volume, volume 5, concludes with the account of Christ's arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection (chapters 18-21). It shows the story to be "Triumph through Tragedy."

Some of the material in this volume has already appeared in other forms. The messages on the resurrection have appeared in booklets published in connection with the *Bible Study Hour.* Material on the trials and the atonement is also being used in this way. All the messages have already been aired over the *Bible Study Hour* as radio sermons and have appeared in the monthly publication, *Bible Studies,* which is mailed regularly to the program's supporters.

Publication of this volume represents an end of a considerably lengthy project. My study of the Gospel of John began in reality during the years of graduate work in Basel, Switzerland, as a result of which a preliminary study of the Gospel appeared under the title *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John.* In December 1970, I began to preach on this Gospel for the Sunday morning services of Tenth Presbyterian Church, which I still serve as pastor. With the exception of various interruptions for special services and events, that series of expositions continued through July 1978. The series began on the radio in the late spring of 1971 and continued to December 1978. The series numbers 270 studies in all. During this time I have been blessed by the support and encouragement of the session and congregation of Tenth Church. I have been helped immeasurably by the editing and proofreading skills

of Miss Caecilie M. Foelster, my secretary. Greatest of all has been the presence and encouragement of the Lord, who increasingly opened up the meaning of the Gospel to me and showed me levels of meaning and application that I had not dreamed of before.

May God himself bless this exposition to the hearts of all who read it, as he has blessed these years of study to me. May he be glorified. May he draw many to that One who "loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." Amen and Amen.

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Chapter 222.
The Final Days

John 18:1

Years ago, when I was in college, there was a course in world literature that always contained on its final examination the question: Is it possible to have a Christian tragedy? It was a question designed to test the understanding as well as the knowledge of the student, as all good examination questions do, for basic to the question (to be answered from the literature studied) was the problem of whether a true experience of Christianity and true tragedy are compatible. The poorer students did not even know what the question meant. Better students analyzed works commonly categorized as tragedy—*Paradise Lost*, *Moby Dick*, *The Scarlet Letter*—but did not answer the question. Only perceptive students answered that in the final analysis a Christian tragedy is impossible, for the essential Christian presuppositions of a sovereign but benevolent God ultimately override the tragic elements.

This does not eliminate the marks of tragedy, of course. In fact, it may be argued that only Christianity of all the world's religions actually takes the tragedy of the human situation with full seriousness. This is

the meaning of the fall, the cross, the bondage of the will, the final judgment. But even greater than these things stands the benevolent and wise purposes of the sovereign God in human history. Life may be dark. Tragedy may come. At times the whole world may seem to be crumbling into pieces. But this is not the end. Therefore, in spite of the tragedy, God still works all things together "for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

Dark Days

It would be possible to illustrate this thesis, not only theoretically but also by numerous examples from the lives of Christians. But among all these examples there is surely nothing more dramatically illustrative of the Christian principle of triumph through tragedy than the events of the closing days of the earthly life of Christianity's founder, Jesus of Nazareth. A detached observer might look upon these days as dismal in the extreme. He would see a young man, a brilliant and compassionate young man, unjustly arrested through the hostility of jealous older men whose authority he threatened. He is falsely convicted and executed. And even then, the execution is not by some "humane" form of execution but by the unbelievably cruel and agonizing death of crucifixion. What could be worse? Nothing! Yet the story, as told by those friends of his who had witnessed most if not all the events, is not the story of a tragic defeat but of a victory. Indeed, the outcome, far from being one of despair and desolation, is actually a gospel—that which is "Good News" to an otherwise tragedy-bound humanity.

One obvious, historical reason for this is that the crucifixion of Christ was followed by a resurrection, which was good news in itself. But this is not the whole of the testimony, or even its heart. The resurrection was good news; it showed that death was not the end of Christ's life, nor need it be the end of ours. But in addition to this, it is also the case, according to the testimony of these witnesses, that the crucifixion itself was good news. Christ's death was good. Thus, the true meaning of the phrase "triumph through tragedy" is not merely that tragedy is followed by triumph but, far more profoundly, that in the hands of God the

tragedy actually becomes the triumph. The apparent defeat becomes victory.

We can say more! For not only does the tragedy in the hands of God become triumph, without the tragedy there really is no triumph. What would the great promises of the final discourses of John's Gospel be without these chapters? Just pipe dreams! What would the miracles be without these latter assurances that they are designed to present to us a sure way of salvation? Nothing! However, in actual fact, these chapters rightly culminate all that has gone before and show how and why the blessings spoken of earlier come to us.

One commentator has written, "Without these two chapters (18, 19)... none of the precious things which have thrilled the heart in the previous chapters could be possible; nay more, none of His own assertions as to what He would be and do, of giving eternal life, of having any of the world, of coming again for them, of sending the Holy Spirit, of preparing a place for them, of having them in the glory with Him, or of having that glory at all; there would be no assembly of God, or restoration of Israel, no gathering of the nations, no millennium, no new heavens and new earth, no adjustment in righteousness of the 'creation of God' of which He is the beginning, no display of grace, no salvation, no revelation of the Father—all these and much more were contingent on His death and resurrection. Without these all things in this book drop out and leave a blank, the blackness of darkness."

So there are dark days, these final days in the earthly life of our Lord. But they are days that are at the same time days of light for those who are of the light. By contrast, the true darkness is for those who will not come to Christ. He and not another is this world's light, and that light is nowhere better seen than in his own cruel death and resurrection.

Days of Blessing

This is not just a later theological reflection on the crucifixion and resurrection narratives either. This is John's own emphasis from beginning to end. As we study these chapters together his unique

emphasis will emerge fully. But even in this opening section it is apparent.

For example, John 18 begins with the departure of Jesus from Jerusalem to the Garden of Gethsemane. He was with the party that entered the Garden that night. He was with Jesus (so closely, in fact, that he was one of the three selected to go off with Jesus and accompany him while he prayed). He witnessed all that transpired in the Garden. Nevertheless, he omits many of the important features that the other Gospel writers contain and introduces others that they omit—all to stress the glory and power of the Son of Man, rather than his mere humanity or apparent weakness.

By consulting the other Gospels we are reminded of what else happened in the Garden. Each of the other Gospels tells us that, having selected Peter, James, and John to go with him, Jesus went off from the others and prayed three times that if it was the will of God, the cup of death might pass by him. Matthew and Luke record the fact that prior to this, Jesus began to be greatly agitated, depressed, and sorrowful; he declared, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Matt. 26:38; cf. Mark 14:34). Luke, who is particularly concerned with the humanity and sufferings of Christ, reports that in spite of the fact that angels appeared and ministered to him, Jesus nevertheless was "in anguish" and "prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44).

John knew these facts as well as any of the other writers (cf. John 12:24-27). Yet he omits them in his account, noting only that Jesus "left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley... [where] there was an olive grove" and was there arrested. Why does John do this? For emphasis. He wishes to stress, not the human weakness of Christ, but rather his mastery over this as well as all other situations.

It is not only in John's omissions that this particular emphasis is noticeable. It is noticeable also in what he includes, particularly in regard to Christ's statements. In the earlier Gospels the scene in the Garden is prefaced by Jesus' prophecy of his coming arrest and death.

He speaks of the shepherd being killed and the sheep scattered (Matt. 26:31; Mark 14:27); he speaks of his being numbered with the transgressors in fulfillment of Isaiah 53 (Luke 22:37). But although John knew these sayings (cf. John 10), he has included as an introduction to this episode, not the prophecy of Jesus' death and suffering, but rather the great promises of Jesus recorded as part of the high priestly prayer of John 17. To be even more accurate, the real preface of this entire section of the Gospel is the verse that begins chapter 13: "It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love" (v. 1).

John emphasizes the fact that the arrest was under the control of Jesus. For one thing, Jesus initiates the actual confrontation, going forth to the soldiers, asking, "Who is it you want?" rather than waiting for the kiss of Judas, as the other Gospels seem to indicate. John includes that otherwise unmentioned episode in which the soldiers and officers fall to the ground as a result of Jesus introducing himself to them with the majestic name of God: Jehovah ("I am"). Finally, even at the moment of the arrest Jesus is dominant; he issues a command—"I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go" (18:8)—and it is followed.

These converging emphases are to show that it was no meaningless and unanticipated tragedy that overtook Jesus of Nazareth at the close of his otherwise promising ministry and so ended it. Rather, it was that ordering of events set forth by God, which events were thus not only to be inevitably fulfilled but also to be filled with great blessing, not only for Christ himself but also for his followers.

Christ's Days, Our Days

In a sense everything that we are to study in the remainder of John's Gospel has bearing on this great theme: that there is no tragedy for Christians. But because we will be looking at this in terms of Christ's life, it is especially necessary at the beginning that we also stop to see

that it must have a profound bearing upon our lives too. For we shall have suffering. There is no doubt of that. We are called to it. There will be dark days. Will they be bitter days? Will we gripe and complain? Or will they be days of victory? Much of the answer depends upon how well we learn the lessons of these chapters.

Let me ask this question: How do Christians most often think of their suffering? Some consider it a breach of trust on the part of God, of course. They reproach him for it. Others simply endure suffering grimly, refusing to ask from whom it has come or even if God might have a purpose in it. But I am not thinking of these. I am thinking of more mature Christians who, because they believe in a sovereign God, readily accept the thought that their suffering, grief, or disappointment first of all passed through God's hand and is intended for them as good. I am asking how they regard suffering. How do they think of it?

From my experience I would say that mature Christians usually think of it in one of three ways, or a combination of them. First, some think of suffering as something to be endured so that in God's own time he might intervene *to remove it* and thus get glory to himself for removing it. An example of this would be sickness, particularly acute sickness that might lead to death. These Christians think that its purpose is that God might remove it so that they can then praise him for their healing. Another example would be an unpleasant line of work, which they could praise God for after the work has been changed for something new.

Second, there are those who look upon suffering as something for God *to transform*. Perhaps, if they were bolder, they might pray for its removal outright. But since they have no confidence that God will do this (or else sense, often rightly, that he has no intention of doing so), they pray that God might make things different. They expect him to change the suffering so that it is no longer the pain or discouragement that it might be for other people.

Third, there are Christians who simply look beyond the dark days of suffering to glory and therefore strive *to ignore* the suffering. They see

no purpose in it, but they go through it for the joys that lie beyond.

Are these views right? Let me acknowledge first that there is an element of truth (and sometimes, in a particular case, the whole truth) in each of them. It is true that suffering is sometimes given so that God might remove it and thus be glorified. The affliction of the man who had been born blind, whose story is told in John 9, would be such an example. Sometimes, too, the suffering is deeply transformed. It is also true, whatever the case in the other areas may be, that there is a realm of joy beyond the sufferings. In Christ's case, there was a resurrection and ascension— beyond the cross. He looked forward to it. Similarly, we are encouraged by those scenes of the redeemed saints in glory recorded by John in Revelation. We rejoice to know that there will be no tears there, neither death, sorrow, crying, or pain (Rev. 21:4).

But is this the uniquely Christian approach to suffering, based upon these chapters from John and other passages? Is the Christian's answer only escape or transformation or sublimation? I think not. Rather the answer is the acceptance of suffering in its fullness for Christ's sake, thereby helping to make up the fullness of his sufferings (as Paul said he himself did) and bringing glory to his name, not by an escape from suffering but by the sheer force of the way in which we bear it.

Two Groups of People

Donald Grey Barnhouse, the founder of the *Bible Study Hour,* once preached a sermon entitled "Tragedy or Triumph." It was an analysis of this problem, and at one point he gave this illustration. He said that one morning early in his ministry a woman stopped him on the street to ask if he would come to see her son. Her son had tuberculosis and was dying. He said, "I'll go home with you now."

"Oh, no," she replied. "Don't come with me. He is very bitter. He might curse you, and I don't want him to know that I asked you. Just drop in later." This was all right with the young pastor. So about half an hour later he rang the bell on the front of one of Philadelphia's little row houses, noticing as he did that there was a front room in which the

young man's bed had been placed and in which he was lying. He introduced himself as the pastor of the nearby church and then openly noticed the woman's sick son.

As he walked over to him the young man became angry and began to curse. "Why does God make me spit my lungs into this cup?" he demanded. "Oh, God is so cruel to me!" He cursed God for his suffering, and became so agitated that Barnhouse thought it would be best to leave. In about a week that young man died.

Several years later Barnhouse was holding a series of Sunday night services in a theater in West Philadelphia. As he finished preaching one night, someone asked, "Will you go to see a young man in this neighborhood who is dying of tuberculosis?" He immediately thought of the other incident, but he went to see the young man and was surprised to find the case completely different. Again, it was a little row house. The man was in the front room. But when Barnhouse began to talk to him the young man exclaimed, "Oh, life is so wonderful since Christ has saved me!" He told his story. He said that he had gotten so weak in the last few months that he had been able to spend only one hour out of twenty-four out of bed. But during that one hour each day he would get dressed and take a walk around the block.

One evening, while he was taking his walk, he noticed the lights on in the neighborhood theater and went in to rest. Barnhouse was preaching, and he listened while he spoke of the love of Christ. He received Jesus as his own personal Savior and Lord. During the months that followed, in that one hour out of bed each day, he visited families in his block and told them of what Christ had done to save them and of how much he loved them. Now, however, he was too weak to go out at all. "But," he said, "I have about fifty relatives in this city. I would like to invite them over next Sunday. And if I do, would you come and speak to them?" Barnhouse said he would, and when he arrived on the next Sunday evening he found a full house of people. They were everywhere—on the stairs, upstairs, in the kitchen, some even on the floor. The young man told of his conversion, and then he invited Barnhouse to tell the story he had told in the theater the night the young man was saved.

Afterward he said, "That was the message spoken the night I believed in Jesus. This is how I came to trust in Christ. I know that the next time you are all together it will be for my funeral, but I wanted to witness to you about Christ before I died." A few days later he did die—triumphantly.

Do you think that testimony failed to have its effect on those relatives? Of course it did not. But it was effective, not because the second man had less pain or because his death was transmuted. Rather it was because he received it as being from God himself, which it truly was, and thereby glorified God in it.

Barnhouse's own comment is as follows: "As we review these two cases, almost identical in circumstances but so different in outlook, we realize anew that the world is divided into two groups—those who are born again, and those who are not. People are either the children of God or they are the children of wrath and of disobedience. In order to become a child of God you must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. As a result of searching the Word of God, and of the experiences of my ministry, I believe that God permits whatever happens to an unbeliever, also to happen to a Christian. The unbeliever cries out against God; but the Christian says, 'Lord, do to me whatever you please.' No matter what your condition in life, if you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, God has a double of you somewhere who is believing in Jesus Christ. If you are in the Home for Incurables, and do not know Christ and think your lot is terrible, someone else in the Home for Incurables is praising God. The Devil has his doctors, and God has his doctors who love in simple faith and trust the Lord. The Devil has his lawyers who connive and cheat; God has his honorable, upright lawyers who seek to aid those in difficulty. God has his rich men and the Devil has his.

"Describe yourself to me. Tell me how old you are, what is your condition, what are your circumstances. I will duplicate them in the life of some Christian. To put it the other way around, whatever happens to a Christian, the same is happening to an unbeliever, and he is crying out, 'God, you can't do this to me!' But the Christian can say, 'O, God, you can do anything you wish to me. You redeemed me. You bought me

with your blood. I am yours, and I know that all things will work together for good because I love you.'"

A Privilege

Here is one last story. Dr. Helen Roseveare, a British medical doctor, served for more than twenty years in Africa, in the state of Zaire. For twelve and a half years she had a frantic but generally wonderful time serving as the only doctor in an area containing more than half a million people (today about one and a half million). But in 1964, revolution overwhelmed the country, and she and her coworkers were thrown into five and a half months of almost unbelievable brutality and torture. There were several cases of tremendous deliverance, sometimes involving circumstances so far-fetched that a non-Christian could hardly believe them. But there was still torture, beatings, the wretched misery of seeing others mutilated and destroyed, and fear—a bone-crushing, overwhelming fear.

On one occasion, when she was on the verge of being executed, a seventeen-year-old student came to her defense and was savagely beaten as a result. He was kicked about like a football and left for dead. She was sick. For a moment she thought that God had forsaken her, even though she did not doubt his reality. But God stepped in and overwhelmed her with the sense of his own presence—in his triumphant bigness—and asked something like this: "Twenty years ago you asked me for the privilege of being a missionary, the privilege of being identified with me. This is it. Don't you want it? This is what it means. These are not your sufferings; they are my sufferings. All I ask of you is the loan of your body."

As the force of that hit home, the doctor said that she was overcome with a great sense of privilege, for privilege it was. She rejoiced to be able to serve her Lord in this or whatever other circumstances he might order for her. "He didn't stop the sufferings. He didn't stop the wickedness, the cruelties, the humiliation or anything. It was all there. The pain was just as bad. The fear was just as bad. But it was now

altogether different. It was in Jesus, for him, with him." That is her testimony.

I close by asking: Are you a believer in Jesus Christ? And are you aware of the privilege of being just where you are and who you are and in precisely the circumstances you find yourself to be in? Jesus has put you there, wherever it is. He has made you, whoever you are. He has created those circumstances, whatever they may be. It is for you to praise him right there and allow those circumstances, even the most tragic circumstances, to be the grounds of his triumph.

Chapter 223. Gethsemane

John 18:1-2

It is true, as pointed out in the last chapter, that the apostle John does not emphasize the sufferings of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, choosing rather to stress his mastery over this as over every other situation. But this does not mean that John was ignorant of what had taken place in the Garden or even that he does not have it in mind as he unfolds his version of the story. We know that he was personally aware of these events, for he was there and was even one of the inner three disciples who accompanied the Lord as he departed a stone's throw from the other eight disciples to pray. We know that John knew the nature of that prayer; for he has anticipated it in chapter 12, where he quotes Jesus as saying, "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No it was for this very reason I came to this hour" (v. 27).

John is not ignorant of the events that transpired in Gethsemane. But he is, as also noted in our last study, concerned to place his own perspective on them. What is it? We might answer that he wants to show Christ in his divine strength rather than in his human weakness, the triumph rather than the tragedy. But that is a general answer rather

than an answer to the question of John's perception of Jesus' struggle in Gethsemane itself. Since we want to consider this account thoroughly, we therefore ask: Does John indicate a particular way in which the struggle in Gethsemane should be viewed? Is there anything in the text to focus our thinking?

I believe there is such an indication in the word "garden," which John uses in verse 1. To us this is hardly remarkable, for we are accustomed to speak always of the Garden of Gethsemane. But this was apparently not a common name in John's day. We notice, for example, that John does not use the word "Gethsemane." Again—this is even more significant—neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke uses the word "garden." The full name by which we know this place, the Garden of Gethsemane, never occurs anywhere. What is more, it is never referred to as a garden except in John's Gospel.

Is this particular way of referring to Gethsemane only a peculiarity? Or is more involved?

West of Eden

I would say that it is possible, if not probable, that John is suggesting a contrast between the Garden of Gethsemane, in which Christ so clearly triumphed, and the Garden of Eden, in which the father of the human race fell so sorely. Moreover, let me point out that I am not the first to think this. This was a popular interpretation of John 18:1 by the church fathers and is one that occurs in the works of commentators and expositors from subsequent generations.

Arthur W. Pink draws the contrast out at some length: "The entrance of Christ into the Garden at once reminds us of Eden. The contrasts between them are indeed most striking. In Eden, all was delightful; in Gethsemane, all was terrible. In Eden, Adam and Eve parleyed with Satan; in Gethsemane, the last Adam sought the face of His Father. In Eden, Adam sinned; in
Gethsemane, the Savior suffered. In Eden, Adam fell; in Gethsemane, the Redeemer conquered. The conflict in Eden took place by day; the

conflict in Gethsemane was waged at night. In the one, Adam fell before Satan; in the other, the soldiers fell before Christ. In Eden the race was lost; in Gethsemane Christ announced, 'Of them whom thou gavest me have I lost none' (John 18:9). In Eden, Adam took the fruit from Eve's hand; in Gethsemane, Christ received the cup from His Father's hand. In Eden, Adam hid himself; in Gethsemane, Christ boldly showed Himself. In Eden, God sought Adam; in Gethsemane, the last Adam sought God! From Eden Adam was 'driven'; from Gethsemane Christ was 'led.' In Eden the 'sword' was drawn (Gen. 3:24); in Gethsemane the 'sword' was sheathed (John 18:11)."

Good versus Evil

We may begin by contrasting the circumstances of Adam and Eve as they faced their trial in Eden with Jesus' circumstances in Gethsemane. It is a contrast between good and evil, or as Pink says, between that which was "delightful" and that which was "terrible."

We remember that Adam and Eve had entered Eden at the peak of God's creative activity. They had a world without sin or death and thus perfect in every way. God had made the man and woman vice-regents over this world, giving them explicit dominion over "the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Gen. 1:26). Adam and Eve had all this without any threat or even suggestion of a lessening of God's great favors. Yet, turning from this overwhelmingly delightful prospect, they sinned.

By contrast, Jesus faced what Adam and Eve could not even begin to imagine: first, physical death in what is probably the most prolonged and excruciating form known to man, and second, spiritual death, from which even his highly disciplined and divinely motivated soul shrank in deep horror. The full measure of what was before Christ is seen in his great agony, bloody sweat, and heart-breaking prayer ("My Father, if it be possible, may this cup be taken from me," Matt. 26:39; cf. Mark

14:36; Luke 22:42). Nevertheless, Jesus did not turn from this but embraced it willingly for our salvation.

God versus Satan

The second gripping contrast between Adam and Eve's conduct in Eden and Christ's conduct in Gethsemane is that our first parents spent their time talking to Satan while Jesus spent his time talking with God. The need for prayer seems to be something that was very much on Christ's mind, for all his actions are geared to meeting it. He leaves Jerusalem for this, a quiet place where he was accustomed often to go, presumably to pray (John 18:2). He separates himself from the larger number of his disciples. He admonishes them to pray (Luke 22:40). Then he prays earnestly himself, returning to pray twice more after interrupting himself to encourage the disciples in their own vigil. Clearly, Jesus felt the need for prayer. But Adam and Eve, though on the brink of that sin that would condemn the race, did not pray. Rather they seemed oblivious to the danger as they communed with Satan.

Why did Christ feel the need for such prayer? Clearly because he felt the force of temptation. We must not think, just because we have the story of the temptation of Christ by Satan at the very start of his ministry (Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13), that Jesus was therefore never tempted again. On the contrary, on one occasion he identified a rebuke by Peter as one of Satan's disguised temptations (Matt. 16:23). And even on this occasion he seems to have temptation in mind, for he admonishes the disciples to pray lest they be drawn into it (Matt. 26:41; Mark 14:38; Luke 22:40, 46).

To what was he tempted? Here we can only speculate, and that carefully, for where Scripture is silent we must say little. Yet we can imagine that the central temptation would be to leave the work of the atonement undone or else seek the accomplishment of our salvation by some other means. The prayer itself seems to suggest the former—"If it be possible, may this cup be taken from me." The former temptation by

Satan in the wilderness suggests the latter—"All this will I give you, if you will bow down and worship me" (Matt. 4:9).

Or again, maybe the temptation was to feel abandoned both by God and men. If this was the nature of Christ's temptation, it would explain the appearance of the angel to strengthen him, for the angel would signify that despite appearances he was not alone.

The lesson for us is not in the nature of his temptations, though ours are often quite similar: to avoid God's work, to attempt to do it in a way other than the way God has mandated, to feel abandoned. Rather, it is in Christ's dependence on prayer. Do we thus value prayer? Do we pray earnestly? Or do we dally with Satan, as Adam and Eve did, or sleep on, as the disciples did?

Two Fell, One Conquered

The third point of contrast between Adam and Eve, on the one hand, and the Lord Jesus Christ, on the other, is also obvious. They fell while he conquered. How soon did they fall? Almost instantly, it would appear. Satan presented his arguments, and they quickly ate the forbidden fruit. Jesus, on the other hand, wrestled in prayer and only prevailed at the end.

Matthew gives us the clearest statement of Christ's prevailing grace in prayer, for he shows progress in Christ's thought and attitude from one prayer to the next. Christ's first prayer, which Matthew records in 26:39 is that the cup that God had poured for him might be taken away, if that should be possible. The actual words are: "My Father, if it be possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." The second prayer, offered after he had come back to find the disciples asleep and had admonished them to "watch and pray" with him, employed nearly the same words as the first but without the explicit request that the cup be removed: "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (v. 42). The third prayer—which, however, is not recorded—must have been to the effect, "I know now that you have given me this cup and that it is

your will that I drink it; therefore, I will drink it completely." We know that Jesus must have come to this point, for immediately after this he rose up and went forth to meet those who were coming to seize him.

How long did this take? Today we can read the entire account of this prayer, beginning with
Matthew 26:39 and ending with Matthew 26:44, in less than one minute, reading slowly. But Jesus probably prayed at least one hour if not three. For when he came to awake Peter after his first period of prayer, he asked, "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" (v. 40).
This seems to suggest that he prayed for about one hour during this first period of prayer and possibly an equal amount during each of the other two. It was only after this that he apparently came to embrace the will of God fully in the matter of his death.

I have no doubt that this conflict, like all the other incidents in Scripture, was recorded for our benefit. And when I ask, "But what benefit are we to derive from it?" I realize that it is to show us how we too may prevail in prayer when we are cast down, distressed, and tempted. Often that phrase, to "prevail in prayer," is used as though it means that we are to keep at prayer until God at last does what we desire. But that is not how Christ prevailed. He kept at prayer until—I speak of Christ's humanity—his will was conformed to God's will, for that was the victory.

We too shall have troubles. Temptations will come; there will be crosses to bear. But we will have victory when, through a submission of our will to God in prayer, we embrace with willing hearts whatever God has for us. In that case, it will not be our will versus God's, as was the case with Adam. Rather it will be God's will and ours together, as was the case with the Son of God and the Father.

The Fruit of the Cup

One of the contrasts Pink makes is particularly suggestive, for he points out that "Adam took the fruit from Eve's hand" while "in Gethsemane,

Christ received the cup from his Father's hand." This leads me to state as a great biblical principle that it is always better to have the cup of life from God's hand, no matter what it contains, than anything else, however desirable, from the hand of another.

Why is this? It is because of who God is. He is the wise, all-powerful, loving God of the universe, the one who truly wishes our good and in addition to that also knows what the good is and how to effect it. Others may wish us well, or they may not. But even if they do, what they choose or recommend for us is not necessarily what turns out to be beneficial in the long run. We think of Eve as she looked upon the fruit and "saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom" and then took of the fruit and gave it to her husband also (Gen. 3:6). But the tree that seemed to be desirable from the human perspective actually brought death to the race. On the other hand, the cup presented to Christ— although it contained both physical and spiritual death and although it was, in the world's eyes, not a thing of wisdom, but rather of foolishness—this cup was actually life and wisdom for God's people.

Not One Lost

The final contrast of these many contrasts between Adam and Eve in Eden and Christ in Gethsemane is the most significant. It is simply that Adam and Eve by their sin plunged the race into misery. They fell and carried their progeny over the cliff of sin into destruction. Christ, on the other hand, stood firm. He did not sin, nor did he shrink from his work. As a result, he saved all whom the Father had given him. In Adam all were lost. Christ could say, "Those you gave me I have kept. None of them is lost."

But why should *I* tell it? Let us permit the Apostle to the Gentiles to tell it, for this contrast forms the basis of that magnificent statement of the superiority of Christ to Adam, found in Romans 5:12-21. In those verses he writes,

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

That is precisely it. That is the meaning of Gethsemane. One writer puts it this way, "Sin, death, and judgment flowed from the act of Adam. Righteousness, life, and kingship flow from the cross of Christ. The sin of Adam was a stone cast into a pool which sent ripples to every inlet. The cross of Christ was the rock of ages cast into the ocean of the love of God, and it is the destiny of all who are in Christ to be carried on the swell of this majestic love and life and power both now and forever."

Chapter 224.
Judas, Who Betrayed Him

John 18:2

In our first two studies of the last segment of John's Gospel (chapters 18-21) we have dealt for the most part with theology. That is, we have discussed the meaning of Christ's suffering, viewing it as a triumph rather than a tragedy and contrasting it to the circumstances surrounding the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This was necessary because this is the perspective with which John himself views the crucifixion, and we must begin here if we are to understand this last and most important section of his narrative.

But it is not only theology that enters into these last chapters. In fact, on the surface theology is not spoken about at all. Rather they are history. They tell what happened during these last hours and days of Jesus' earthly life. They tell who and what and why. Consequently, they are to be studied as history primarily, though in conjunction with that we must necessarily see what these events mean for Christianity.

This is of great importance. Sometimes in our Christian preaching and witnessing the events of these climactic days of Christ's life are allowed to pass almost imperceptibly into the realm of mere ideas with the result that the historical base and, therefore, truthfulness of Christianity evaporates. But these are not ideas only. They are facts. They are presented to us in Gospels, which are purportedly "good news" accounts of what actually transpired. Only by keeping the full importance of these events as history do we have something that may legitimately be proclaimed as good news to sinners.

Why Judas?

In a sense we were in the midst of the final events even before beginning our study of chapter 18.
For as far back as chapter 12, Jesus has set these in motion by means of his dramatic entry into Jerusalem on what we have come to term Palm

Sunday. Ever since then Jesus has been preparing his disciples for the end, and equally important, his enemies among the rulers of the people have been plotting to destroy him. With chapter 18, these events actually get underway, for the forces of antagonism now break forth to effect Christ's arrest, trial, condemnation, and crucifixion.

As John relates his version of the story he begins with Judas. Judas is the one who betrayed Jesus, as each of the Gospel writers knows, and it was his activity, first in conferring with the chief priests and then in leading the arresting party to the Garden of Gethsemane, that actually made the arrest of Jesus possible. What about Judas? What precisely was his role in all this, beyond the mere fact of his betrayal? To put the matter in its baldest form, why was Judas and his betrayal necessary for the chief priests at all?

To this question two answers are usually given, either that Judas was necessary in order to lead the arresting party to Christ's hiding place during these last days or else that he was necessary in order to assure a secret arrest because of the leaders' fear of the people. But this is not as clear a matter as one might suppose. To begin with, as Frank Morison has pointed out in a very popular study of the historical forces leading to the crucifixion of Christ, "To regard Judas merely as a common informer, ready (for a consideration) to lead the authorities to the secret hiding place of his erstwhile Friend and Leader, is absurd." For Jesus was not in hiding. In fact, he can hardly have been more open. Earlier he had removed himself from the dangerous vicinity of Jerusalem, knowing that his hour was not yet fully come (John 11:54). But from the moment he had arrived in Bethany from Jericho on the Friday preceding his crucifixion no attempt seems to have been made to conceal his movements at all. The resurrection of Lazarus, which took place on that day, was done openly. On the next day, Saturday, many came to see him and talk both to him and Lazarus. On Sunday Jesus entered Jerusalem with great display while those who were with him and those who came out from the city to greet him cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King

of Israel!" (John 12:13). On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday he had traveled back and forth openly.

Under these circumstances how could it be that the leaders of the people needed Judas, still less would have been willing to pay him money, to tell them where Jesus was? Obviously, if they had felt free to arrest Jesus, the leaders could have done so in Jerusalem at nearly any unguarded moment. Or they could easily have sent to Bethany and have arrested him there.

It is possible at this point to introduce the other common explanation of Judas's role: to effect the arrest of Christ in secret for fear of the people. But this is at best a half-truth, as Morison indicates. True, there was undoubtedly a real fear on the part of the chief priests and Pharisees of what the people might do. There was fear of a disturbance that might cause the intervention of the Roman armies with dire consequences for them. Even greater, there was fear that the vast multitudes in Jerusalem might actually believe on Jesus. Earlier the leaders had said, "What are we accomplishing? Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (John 11:47-48). Out of that council had come the decision to have Jesus killed. But surely there were other times at which these leaders might have taken Jesus secretly—in Bethany in the early morning or late evening, on the road between Bethany and Jerusalem, in a quiet corner of the capital, even in the upper room. That they did not do this but rather relied on Judas to bring them information necessary to achieve the arrest suggests that there were other and even more important factors.

Fear of Jesus

Here Morison makes a suggestion that is of great value in determining why events moved as they did. He says, "Personally, I am convinced that beneath the ostensible and acknowledged fear of the people, there was a deeper and more potent fear—a fear that explains all their

singular hesitancies and vacillations, until a welcome message reached their astonished ears—the fear of

Christ Himself."

There are two senses in which this must have been true. In the first place, these shrewd leaders of the people could not have been unaware of Christ's unusual appeal to the masses. Like John the Baptist before him, Jesus had preached on occasion to great crowds of people, some of whom would travel considerable distances to hear him. On at least one and possibly more occasions in Galilee, those who heard him had been fed by him and wanted to make him a king, a political Messiah. He had turned them down then. But who could tell what would happen if for some reason Jesus should decide that he really would assume a messianic role? Moreover, suppose he should decide to make his bid in Jerusalem at this feast? It would not seem at all impossible to the Jewish leaders that Jesus might well whip the expectations of the city to a new peak of excitement and frenzy, particularly since he seemed already to have launched himself on such a course by entering the capital on a donkey the previous Sunday.

This would not be their only or worst fear, however. There was also the matter of Christ's undeniable, supernatural power. Early in his ministry they had, like true skeptics, denied the miracles or else, as in the case of the man born blind, attributed them to some unrelated intervention by God (John 9:24). But by this point they were openly acknowledging the miracles and were afraid of them.

Moreover, there had been the matter of their former unsuccessful attempts to arrest him. John reports several of these, though there may have been others. On one occasion a body of officers, who probably were temple guards, was dispatched by the chief priests to take him. But after a while they returned with the task undone. "Why didn't you bring him in?" they were asked.

Their reply was an incredible reply for soldiers. "No man ever spoke the way this man does" was their answer (cf. John 7:32, 45-49).

Later, at the end of chapter 8, another move was made against Christ, this time to stone him. "But Jesus," we are told, "hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds" (v. 59). A third time we are told that "again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp" (10:39).

What would the rulers have been thinking as a result of their abortive attempts to take Jesus? Probably they would not have voiced their most fundamental fear, even to themselves. But they must have been fearing —because of Christ's obvious power and their own earlier failures— that in the ultimate analysis he might perhaps be unarrestable? *Unarrestable!* If this were the case, it would explain their failure to do anything during the earlier part of this last Passover week, their final abrupt decision that very nearly failed, and their use of Judas.

The Time Element

The one thing that is immediately apparent to anyone who studies carefully the circumstances of Jesus' arrest and trial is that they were all greatly rushed. This is apparent from the fact that the first trial (or hearing) was held at night, which was illegal under Jewish law regarding capital cases. It is also apparent from the fact that in order to try Jesus' case, Pilate was prevailed upon to come out of his palace early on what would normally not have been a trial day. Even more significantly, it is evident from the case itself, which was obviously unprepared. Judicially, the case was a blunder, for it was obviously failing until Caiaphas hit upon the illegal but brilliant stroke of interrogating the witness himself. The result was that, when challenged in the name of Jehovah, Jesus declared his divinity and was convicted on a charge of blasphemy (Matt. 26:6366; Mark 14:60-64; Luke 22:70-71).

Briefly put, the problem the leaders faced was that they were arresting Jesus so close to the
Passover sabbath that it was a matter of real difficulty to hold the two trials (their own and the Roman) and have him condemned and executed before the Passover began at what I believe to be sundown on Thursday. Their solution was to hold an initial hearing at night and the

formal trial, followed by the Roman trial, at the earliest possible moment the next morning. But why did they wait that long? Or why, assuming that they compressed the events in order to get the whole thing out of the way as quickly as possible, were they not better prepared when they actually made their move against Jesus?

The only reasonable explanation is that they had not been planning on making an arrest before the Passover but that Judas had somehow brought them information that led them to think that, in spite of the difficulties, this was indeed the opportunity they had been waiting for. What might Judas have said? Here, of course, we are only speculating, for the Scriptures do not give us his exact words. But if we remember that Jesus had been talking about his forthcoming death in Judas's presence, and if we remember the leaders' fear of perhaps not being able to effect Christ's arrest, which they may well have shared with Judas earlier, it is entirely possible that Judas left the upper room with the message: 'Jesus is thinking and talking about death. He has been suggesting this for some time, but he is now talking as if his death is imminent. I would say that the mood of surrender is upon him. If you move now, without delay, I think he would willingly go with you and your worst fears would be resolved. Moreover, he is going to go to Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives and will wait there until I come. Hurry and make your arrangements. I will lead you to him."

At this point the question would have been whether or not the necessary arrangements could be made in time. There had to be a preliminary hearing at which the accusation could be worked out. The Sanhedrin would have to be gathered. And then, most important of all, they would have to determine whether Pilate, the Roman governor, would consent to hear a capital case early the next morning on what would normally not have been a court day. Someone would have to go and ask him, probably Caiaphas himself. Meanwhile, the arresting party would have to be aroused and set in order. When we view the events in this light we can see why so much time elapsed between Judas's departure from the upper room and Christ's eventual arrest in the Garden at least three hours later.

During this time, Jesus was clearly waiting in the Garden for his arrest instead of going back over the Mount of Olives to Bethany as was his custom. He waited while Judas carried his message, the leaders made their arrangements, and the arresting party made its way out of the city to seize him.

Who Killed Jesus?

All this has bearing upon two very important matters. First, it indicates that Jesus was in control of these events from the beginning. They did not come upon him by accident, but rather he willed them in conformity to his knowledge of the will of his Father. We have seen this truth already. Clearly, when Jesus came up to Bethany from Jericho, as he did on the preceding Friday, and then raised Lazarus, he precipitated the final decision of the leaders to have him killed. He did so knowingly. When he rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday he carried the confrontation a step farther. When he cleansed the temple, as the synoptic Gospels record (Matt. 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-47; cf. John 2:13-16 for an earlier incident), he further intensified the leaders' ire. On this very night, he dispatched Judas on his errand of betrayal. At last, we find him waiting in the Garden for the arrest.

Historically, there has been a heated discussion as to who killed Jesus. Gentiles who have not known their Bible too well (or the evil of their own hearts) have tried to blame the Jews. Jews (and others) have blamed the Gentiles; for it was Gentiles in the person of Pilate, the Roman governor, who actually pronounced the death sentence. Sometimes these views have led to fierce anti-Semitism or an opposite anti-Christian feeling. But these are not the most important details. In fact, they are relatively insignificant. By contrast, the most important thing that can be said about the death of Christ is that God the Father willed it. It was God who ordained that he should be killed for our sin. The second important fact is that Jesus also willed his death out of love for us and in obedience to the revealed will of his Father.

Moreover, he ordered the events of this last Passover week to indicate the meaning of what he was doing. For just as he ordered his entry into

Jerusalem to correspond to the exact time at which the Passover lambs were being led up to the city, so also did he time his death to coincide with the killing of those same lambs. He was the great Passover Lamb of which they were but shadows. It was his blood, rather than theirs, which was to take away the sins of the world.

Again, there is this final lesson. It concerns Judas, who was so close to Christ and yet was unsaved. Think how close he was. He had been with Jesus for at least three years. He had heard his teaching. He had even understood his teaching; for although he had not understood the meaning of Christ's death, he had at least understood Christ's warning that he was to die. Judas was that close to Jesus. He understood his thoughts. Yet he was unsaved. I put it to you: It is possible to be quite close to Christ, to sit in a Christian church listening to good sermons, to hear good Bible teaching by radio, even to understand what you hear, and yet fail to make that personal commitment to Christ that is the necessary human response to God's work of salvation.

How foolish it is to come that close and yet be lost. How much wiser, by contrast, to put your faith in that One who is altogether lovely and who willingly died for your salvation.

Chapter 225.
The Arrest!

John 18:3-11

I do not know how you might have described the arrest of Jesus of Nazareth in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before his crucifixion had you been there to observe it, for I do not know the perspective you might have had. If you were Caiaphas, you would doubtless have reported it as a triumph: "At last we have seized him!" If you were the captain of the band of soldiers who actually effected the arrest, you might have reported it quite factually: "Fourteenth of Nisan, eleven thirty P.M., arrested, one prisoner, Jesus of Nazareth." I do know,

however, that if you had been John the evangelist and if you had been led in your writing by the Holy Spirit, as he was, you would have reported that, from beginning to end Jesus, and not his captors, was in complete charge of the situation. It was he who delayed in the Garden while the arresting party was coming. It was he who went forth to meet them, thereby surrendering himself voluntarily. Moreover, even at the very moment of the arrest, he showed his control over circumstances, for he demonstrated power toward the soldiers, grace toward his own disciples, and mercy to those who were (perhaps unwittingly in this case) his enemies.

It is a ludicrous situation, men with weapons coming forward to arrest the Son of God, and John does not allow us to miss the irony. We remember, for example, that it is John who has stressed more than any other Gospel writer that Jesus is the light of this world. He has done that in the opening chapter, where the word "light" in reference to Jesus occurs six times in just nine verses. Later he twice quotes Christ's own claim to be "the light of the world" (8:12; 9:5). Now those of the darkness come in the darkness with "lanterns and torches" to seek him out.

Moreover, they come with weapons. From his enemies' point of view, these were no doubt thought to be necessary. His enemies were afraid of Christ and were worried about what might happen if he should choose to resist them. They were right to be worried. If he chose to resist them, no weapons would have been sufficient. Jesus was arrested, so John clearly indicates, because he willingly chose to give himself up to die to save us.

Today also those who are the enemies of Christ depend on equally foolish lights and weapons. It is not literal lamps upon which our contemporaries rely, of course. It is rather the light of "progress" or the light of "reason." But however valuable these lights may be in purely human terms, they are clearly foolish when arrayed against him who is himself the Light. His light cannot be extinguished by our lights, for ours owe their existence to him. He is the source of all light and reason. Thus, our thinking runs to foolishness when we fail to acknowledge

him, as Paul indicates in Romans when he says that having refused to glorify God as God, men and women became vain in their imaginations, "and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles" (1:21-23). Similarly, human weapons, which the enemies of Christ frequently resort to when reason fails, are also useless.

God's Power

John is not especially interested in the weakness of men, however. What he is really interested in is the power of Jesus, which he conveys by a rather remarkable incident. It is an incident that none of the other Gospels relates. John writes that Jesus, having seen the approaching soldiers and knowing all that was in store for him, went forth to them and initiated the arrest by a question: "Who is it you want?"

It must have been dark in the Garden in spite of the full moon of Passover (or else a supernatural blindness had been placed upon Christ's enemies), for they did not fully recognize him. If they had, they would have replied, "You! We seek you." Instead they answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth."

At this point, according to John, Jesus answered by saying "I am" ("he" is not in the Greek text), and immediately, so we are told, the arresting party "drew back and fell to the ground," where they remained until Jesus apparently released them by asking his question once again.

What produced this strange reaction? It may be, as some commentators have argued, that it is really not a miracle. There have been cases where the hand of an evil person has been stayed momentarily by the innocence or overbearing presence of the one to be victimized. Kings have sometimes had this effect on mere soldiers of the enemy. Executioners have sometimes been unable to strike an innocent person. Alexander Maclaren, who explores this line of thought in his commentary, writes, "There must have been many in that band who had heard him, though, in the uncertain light of quivering moonbeams and

smoking torches, they failed to recognize him till he spoke. There must have been many more who had heard of him, and many who suspected that they were about to lay hands on a holy man, perhaps on a prophet. There must have been reluctant tools among the inferiors, and no doubt among the leaders whose consciences needed but a touch to be roused to action. To all, his calmness and dignity would appeal, and the manifest freedom from fear or desire to flee would tend to deepen the strange thoughts which began to stir in their hearts." Thoughts like these may well have caused Christ's captors to fall back in dismay or consternation.

But this does not seem to be the whole of the picture, as Maclaren also recognizes, for John does not merely say that the officers and soldiers paused for a moment in their efforts to arrest Jesus. He says that they actually stepped backward and fell to the ground. Moreover, and this is of great importance, they did so in response not merely to Christ's presence but rather to the majestic words he uttered: "I am" or (as most of our translations have it) "I am he."

Is this significant? It is if we remember that the meaning of the great name of God, Jehovah, revealed to Moses at the burning bush at the time of God's commissioning him to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, is "I am that I am." It is a form of the verb "to be." Thus, when Jesus replied to his enemies by saying, "I am," it may well have been that he used his own great name, Jehovah, the name above every name (Phil. 2:9-11), and that hearing this name uttered by the God-man threw the arresting party into utter confusion and rendered them helpless even to stand before him.

Maclaren says, "I am inclined to think that here, as there [he is thinking of the transfiguration], though under such widely different circumstances and to such various issues, there was for a moment a little rending of the veil of his flesh, and an emission of some flash of the brightness that always tabernacled within him; and that, therefore, just as Isaiah, when he saw the King in his glory, said, 'Woe is me, for I am undone!' and just as Moses could not look upon the Face, but could only see the back parts, so here the one stray beam of manifest divinity

that shot through the crevice, as it were, for an instant, was enough to prostrate with a strange awe even those rude and insensitive men. When he said, 'I am He,' there was something that made them feel, 'This is One before whom violence cowers abashed, and in whose presence impurity has to hide its face.'"

It is a great contrast, this revelation of the glory and power of Jesus at the very moment of his arrest in Gethsemane, but it is only one more example of the paradox of the incarnation found throughout the pages of the Word of God. We look to his birth and see a picture of human weakness, a baby lying in a manger. But we turn to the fields of Bethlehem and find that birth announced by angels. He is born poor, but a star leads eastern kings to present their gold, frankincense, and myrrh. At his baptism he identified himself with those who repent of their sins; but he had no sin, and a voice from heaven is heard declaring, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). He is so exhausted that he falls asleep in the back of a boat that soon is pitching wildly in a storm on Galilee. The disciples, seasoned fishermen, are frightened. They wake him, and he immediately calms the waves. At the grave of Lazarus, Jesus weeps, but then he speaks the word in power and the dead man comes forth in resurrection. In the Garden he prays in agony that if it might be possible this cup should pass from him. But moments later he goes forth to confront his enemies and overpower them with the sheer force of his presence.

This strange blending of opposites is a clue to the first reason why Jesus did what he did on this occasion. It was to show at this important moment that he was more than man. Man? Yes, but also *God manifest in flesh.* He would have it known that it was as God as well as man that he was about to die for our salvation. He must be a man to die. But he must also be God if that death was to be adequate as a ransom price for our sin. This he declares at the moment of his capture.

Second, the incident of his display of power over his enemies shows that *his death is voluntary* and not coerced. If he had been unwilling to

die, no amount of troops or weapons could ever have forced him. He could have walked away as he did on numerous former occasions.

Finally, Jesus acted as he did to make it clear that those who were arresting him and those who stood behind their action by commanding it were *without excuse.* Some in the arresting party may never have seen Christ before. But they will never be able to plead that they were without any indication as to who he was. They were not ignorant of his divine glory. Thus, if they continued on their way after he had released them from their bondage to his power, it was because they did not want to recognize or heed the truth and not because it was unknown to them. So also will it be in the day of Christ's second appearing. In that day too his deity will be made manifest and the guilt and sinful intransigence of man will be exposed. That will be a day of judgment and not of grace. Today is the time to turn from sin and acknowledge him both as Savior and Lord.

Grace for Christ's Disciples

There is also a second feature of the arrest of Christ that the other Gospel writers overlook. He commands the officers and soldiers that since it is he they had come to take, his disciples should be allowed to go their way (v. 8). This is a statement of grace toward his disciples—effective grace. Those whom he had protected were allowed to go their own way so that, as John says,
"The words he had spoken would be fulfilled: 'I have not lost one of these you gave me'" (v. 9). The reference is to the statements of John 6:39 and 17:12.

When John calls attention to the statements of Christ given earlier he is, of course, broadening the protecting grace of Christ from this one incident in which only the eleven disciples were protected to that general exercise of God's grace in which all Christ's people are saved. It is true that Jesus did protect the eleven, for without a doubt these soldiers and officers had intended to arrest the disciples too. We know this because Mark tells us of their attempt to seize a certain young man who was wrapped in a linen cloth but who left it in their hands and fled

away naked when they laid hands upon him (Mark 14:51-52). Nevertheless, as John quotes Jesus on this occasion he is also aware that this is but one small example of a greater protection by which Jesus constantly preserves those of all ages whom the Father has given him.

How does Jesus exercise this persevering grace toward those who had believed in him? Here are a number of verses that tell us what God is able to do and therefore will do for his people. Hebrews 7:25—"Therefore he is completely able to save those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." Second Timothy 1:12—"He is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day." Hebrews 2:18—"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." Philippians 3:20-21—"The Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." Jude 24-25—"To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen."

When we put these verses together they tell us that Jesus shows his effective, persevering grace with us by lifting us from the darkness of this world into his own marvelous light, by interceding for us in heaven, by guarding our spiritual deposits, by seeing us through temptation, by saving even our bodies at the time of the last resurrection, and by bringing us at last and without blemish into the presence of his own and the Father's glory. He does this by placing himself between us and our enemies.

Mercy to All

There is one final incident in John's account of Christ's arrest that is, unlike the first two incidents, narrated by each of the other Gospel writers also. It concerns Peter who, when he saw that Jesus was about to be arrested, quickly drew the sword he was wearing and swung at the young man leading the column. No doubt Peter intended to strike off his

head. But the young man ducked—his name was Malchus, a servant of the high priest, Caiaphas—and so lost only his ear. Luke tells us, in reporting the full account, that Jesus then touched his ear and healed him (Luke 22:51). John adds that he also rebuked Peter, saying, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father gives me?" (18:11).

As we look at this incident we see many truths in it. One lesson is the folly of that fleshly activity that, insensitive to God's plan and purposes, seeks to strike out in God's defense. Peter's zeal for Christ was not conditioned by knowledge, which was the inevitable outcome of his failure in the preceding hours to observe Christ's command to him to "watch and pray" (Matt. 26:41). He was courageous but ignorant. Later he would not even be courageous, for he would deny Christ before a servant. Peter failed. And so shall we if our zeal is not nurtured upon the knowledge that Christ gives and is not strengthened by him.

This and other lessons aside, surely the greatest truth of this incident is that Jesus was here showing mercy even to his enemies, and this even at the time they came to thrust him toward his execution.

In this last verse Jesus speaks of "the cup the Father gives me." It is one of two cups spoken of often in Scripture. One is the cup of salvation. It is mentioned in Psalm 116:13 ("I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord"). The other cup is the cup of God's wrath or tribulation, which is referred to here. Earlier Jesus had prayed that this cup might pass from him (Matt. 26:39). Two cups: the cup of salvation and the cup of God's wrath! Every person who has ever lived shall drink from one of them. But those who drink of the cup of salvation by God's grace will drink of it only because Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath in their place.

Chapter 226.
The Jewish Trial

John 18:12-14

Something about trials, particularly great trials that set precedent and determine the flow of history, uniquely captures and enthralls people's minds. For example, in all of American history, probably no single event has created so much interest nor sustained it for so long a time as the inevitable outworking of justice following the break-in at the Democratic campaign headquarters in the Watergate complex in Washington, D.C., on the night of June 16, 1972, culminating in the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon, effective August 9, 1974, over two years later.

True, the chief defendant never came to trial, though scores of his staff and other underlings did. But the issue revolved about this president—his character, politics, and abuse of power. It was that issue that kept the American electorate enthralled for this long period. At times the press seemed to cover little else. When, at the peak of the investigations, the Ervin Committee began televised hearings in the Senate Caucus Room (on May 17, 1973), the nation almost stopped its regular work to follow the day-by-day revelations. Businessmen brought television sets to their offices. Bars tuned their sets to these historic deliberations. Even in the nation's capital, public hearings were suspended. In the evenings, the Public Broadcasting Service reran portions of the day's hearings for the nighttime television audience and as a result experienced the greatest response to any programming in its history—82,000 letters and over $1,250,000 in new memberships and contributions. The Ervin Committee itself received letters at a rate of between 1,000 and 9,000 per day, and by November the total topped 1,000,000. Besides what other investigative bodies spent, the Ervin Committee alone spent at least $1,500,000.

This unique interest in the outcome of some monumental trial is also observable in ancient history and in our own abiding interest in those ancient events. Several trials come to mind— Socrates before the leaders of Athens, Charles I facing a sober but liberty-minded English

Parliament, Alfred Dreyfus in France, Aaron Burr, Mary Stuart, the defendants at Nuremberg.

These trials have engaged the minds and imaginations of millions. Yet, no trial has so challenged our race or so charged our emotions as the trial of Jesus by the Jewish and Roman authorities in Palestine.

Walter M. Chandler, a former member of the New York bar of lawyers and author of an excellent book on the trial of Jesus, has written, "These [other] trials, one and all, were tame and commonplace, compared with the trial and crucifixion of the Galilean peasant, Jesus of Nazareth. These were earthly trials, on earthly issues, before earthly courts. The trial of the Nazarene was before the high tribunals of both heaven and earth; before the Great Sanhedrin, whose judges were the master-spirits of a divinely commissioned race; before the court of the Roman Empire that controlled the legal and political rights of men throughout the known world, from Scotland to Judea and from Dacia to Abyssinia."

It is of great importance that we study the trial of Jesus thoroughly. We study it because of its interest and its obvious implications. We ask: Was it rightly done? Was Jesus guilty as charged? Or was he innocent? What were the charges against the prisoner? Were proper procedures followed or were they violated? And—which is perhaps the most important question of all— what does this have to say to us about our own systems of law and our relationships to Jesus?

Two Trials

We must begin with a general overview of the events in which the trial (literally, trials) took place. These have four main features.

First, there was *the arrest*, which has already been discussed in the previous chapter. This took place on the evening before the Jewish Passover in the year A.D. 30, probably on Wednesday, April 5. This would have been late, at eleven or twelve o'clock at night. It occurred through the agency of a band of temple officers or Roman soldiers who were guided by Judas.

Second, there was *the Jewish trial*. This had three separate parts. First, there was a preliminary hearing by night before Annas. This is what John seems to be describing in his Gospel, though the issue is somewhat confused due to his use of the phrase "the high priest" for both Annas and Caiaphas, before whom the second part of the trial was conducted. The reason for this double use of the reference is that, according to Jewish law, the high priest held his high office for life but the Romans, under whose indulgence the Jewish system of government was allowed to function, albeit somewhat impoverished, had displaced high priests who were not to their liking and had put others in their place. Thus, at the time of Christ's arrest, there were: Caiaphas (the Roman appointee), Annas (the elder high priest, who would have been recognized as the true high priest by all Jews), and others (who had also been appointed by the Romans and afterward deposed). Apparently, John describes the appearance of Jesus before Annas, at which time Jesus refused to testify against himself and was therefore unjustly struck by a minor court officer (18:19-23).

The second phase of the Jewish trial was before Caiaphas, to whom Annas had sent Jesus when he perceived that his own method of interrogation was fruitless. The trial before Caiaphas was the significant trial; therefore, it is the one described at length by the Synoptic writers (cf. Matt. 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54). Various witnesses were brought forward who, however, could not agree on their testimony and were therefore dismissed. According to the Synoptic accounts, this trial was moving toward a swift motion of acquittal (and should have resulted in acquittal) when Caiaphas himself intervened illegally to demand of the prisoner: "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. 26:63). When Jesus, who was not under obligation to testify against himself but who nevertheless would not refuse this official challenge in the name of Jehovah, replied, "Yes, it is as you say," he was immediately convicted of blasphemy by a unanimous vote.

The third phase of the Jewish trial took place the following morning at daybreak (Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71). The pertinent

questioning of the previous night was reiterated formally and a judgment secured. This phase of the trial involved the entire Sanhedrin, the highest court of Judaism.

The third feature of these final events was *the Roman trial.* This was necessary because, although the Jewish court could convict, it could not execute and therefore had to seek Roman concurrence in its verdict. This trial also had three parts. First, there was the prearranged appearance before Pilate (Matt. 27:2, 11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-38). Here, for reasons yet to be studied, the anticipations of the Jewish leaders seemed to be frustrated; for rather than proceeding with a *pro forma* trial and judgment, which the leaders had been led to expect, Pilate suddenly balked and tried to free the prisoner. The second part of the trial is an appearance before Herod, for when Pilate heard that Jesus was a Galilean, he tried to escape responsibility by sending Jesus to one who might be thought to have better jurisdiction (Luke 23:6-12). Herod sent Jesus back, however. So the third part of the Roman trial, the part at which Jesus was actually given over to crucifixion (though he had not been convicted of anything and was, in fact, pronounced innocent), was before Pilate. This trial, the crucial one, is recorded by all the Gospel writers (Matt. 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39-19:16).

The final feature of these events was *the crucifixion,* the execution of the sentence of the two courts.

Hebrew Law

It is evident from this brief survey of the features of Christ's arrest, trial, and execution, that the first major concern of the student with these events should be the Jewish trial. But it is impossible to understand this trial apart from at least a rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew law and legal practice.

Unfortunately, this is not such an easy subject to familiarize oneself with. To begin with, there is a double base for Hebrew law: the Mosaic law (or Pentateuch), and the Talmud, or oral (not written) law, built

upon it. Again, the Talmudic law is of great volume and is very complex. It has two parts: the Mishnah, which is the basic law, and the Gemara, which is what we would call a commentary upon it. The relation between the Gemara and the Mishnah might be compared to the debate over a proposed law in the United States Congress, preserved in the *Congressional Record*, and the law that results. Only in the case of the Talmud, the law comes first and the
Gemara follows. A further complication is that there are actually two Talmuds, the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud. The Jerusalem Talmud was written down first (in the fourth century). The Babylonian Talmud was written down in the fifth century and is four times longer. Published in English translation and in contemporary format, the Babylonian Talmud might occupy as many as four hundred volumes. Moreover, as if the matter were not difficult enough, there is a puzzling question as to which laws eventually expressed in the Mishnah were actually followed in judicial proceedings at the time of Jesus.

On the other hand, in dealing with the trial of Jesus the matter is not really as difficult as these comments make it sound. For one thing, we need only deal with Hebrew law in the matter of a crime punishable by death, a capital offense, and not with the many hundreds of other matters dealt with in the Talmud. For another, many able scholars have already sifted through this material and summarized the relevant principles admirably. We may consider them under several categories:

1. *The court in capital cases.* The only court authorized to sit in capital cases in Israel was the Great Sanhedrin or Grand Council. It numbered seventy-one members and convened at Jerusalem. Its name was derived from the Greek word *sunedrion*, which denoted a legislative body gathered together to debate in a deliberate or sitting posture, but it did not date merely from the impingement of Greek culture upon the Hebrew people. Tradition placed the founding of the Great Sanhedrin in the wilderness under Moses, for Numbers 11:16-17 records God's instruction to Moses to gather together "seventy of Israel's elders" to perform judicial functions. These seventy plus Moses would have been seventy-one.

Whatever its history, the Sanhedrin certainly existed and was vested with the highest authority in religious and other national matters in Israel

(except for the authority of Rome) at the time of Jesus. The Sanhedrin was organized traditionally into three chambers—a chamber of 23 priests, a chamber of 23 scribes, and a chamber of 23 elders—though often this was not strictly followed. To these, two presiding officers were added, making a total of seventy-one. The three chambers represented the religious, legal, and democratic elements of Jewish life. This threefold division is referred to by Jesus in Matthew 16:21, which says, "From that time Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hand of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised" (cf. Mark 14:53).

2. *Qualifications of judges.* Since members of the Great Sanhedrin alone were authorized to judge capital cases, the qualifications for membership in the Sanhedrin are therefore synonomous with qualifications for such judges. Some of these qualifications were obvious. The member of the Sanhedrin was to be a Hebrew of the Hebrews, that is, a full-blooded Jew born of two Jewish parents. He was to be learned in law and to have had prior legal experience. He had to be a linguist, for trials of those who did not speak Hebrew would take place and interpreters were not allowed in Jewish courts. He must be humble and of good repute. Most important, he was not to sit if he had any personal interest in the outcome of the trial. Thus, even a well-qualified member of the Sanhedrin would have to step aside temporarily if he was related to the defendant or stood to benefit from a verdict.

3. *Witnesses.* The qualifications of witnesses and their role in legal proceedings is perhaps the most interesting feature of Jewish law, for unlike the previous matters mentioned, in this Jewish law took a course strikingly different from Roman law and those derivative legal systems that we know today in the Western world.

First, the role of witnesses was considerably more important than in the trials we know. In our trials a witness is called upon to testify merely to what he knows, and the total case is made up of the collected testimony of whatever number of witnesses is necessary to establish the defendant's guilt or innocence. This was not true in Israel. In Hebrew law the testimony of the witness had to be complete. That is, it had to pertain to the whole of the crime of which the defendant was accused. One authority says of this system, "Even where there appeared a legal number of duly qualified witnesses, the testimony was insufficient to convict, unless they agreed not only with regard to the prisoner's offense, but also with regard to the mode of committing it. Rabbinic law does not subject a person to capital, nor even to corporal punishment, unless all witnesses charge him with one and the same criminal act, their statements fully agreeing in the main circumstances, and declaring that they saw one another, while seeing him engaged in the crime."

The second qualification for witnesses is suggested in the foregoing, namely, that there must be two or more witnesses to convict (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6-7; 19:15). This maxim is an obvious one in any legal system, but in Judaism it was carried to a heightened degree in that the witnesses had to agree on each particular or else the prisoner was to be discharged immediately.

Here certain formulas were used. First, there was an examination of the witnesses (separately, of course) in matters relating to the time and place of the alleged crime. It was called the Hakiroth and consisted of seven set questions: (1) Was it during a year of Jubilee? (2) Was it in an ordinary year? (3) In what month? (4) On what day of the month? (5) At what hour? (6) In what place? (7) Do you identify this person? The second set of questions, termed the Bedikoth, embraced all matters not brought out in the first series of questions and constituted what we might call a cross-examination. This was taken with the utmost seriousness and rigor. Thus, if one witness's testimony varied from another's testimony in even the slightest of these particulars, the testimony was immediately declared invalid. An example of this is the way in which Susanna was acquitted of the false charge of adultery in

the apocryphal book of that name, when the elders who had conspired against her were unable to agree on the type of tree under which the act was supposed to have been committed. If it was clear that the testimony had been falsely borne, the witnesses were then punished with the same fate that would have fallen upon the defendant had he or she been convicted. This is what happened to the false judges who had accused Susanna.

A third characteristic of witnesses under Jewish law was that they themselves must be the accusers. This means that there were no prosecutors in Hebrew courts, no lawyers for the state. Instead, those who had seen the crime were, first, to arrange for the arrest of the criminal and, second, present the accusation before the nation's judges.

Finally, it is particularly noteworthy that they were also to have explicitly warned the defendant of the potential legal consequence of his or her crime immediately before the crime was committed. This provision of the law was termed "antecedent warning." It seems to have had three purposes: (1) to protect the potential offender against his own ignorance and rashness and thus deter the crime if possible, (2) to aid in establishing criminal intent at the later trial, and (3) to assist the judges in assessing the proper penalty. So far as is known, this maxim has no counterpart in any judicial system of any nation either ancient or modern and is, in fact, so stringent that it is impossible to see how the death penalty could have been secured against anyone in Israel except under the most extreme and unusual circumstances. And indeed, that was precisely its intent, for so highly did the Jews regard the life of an Israelite that anything that could possibly head off an execution was rigorously employed. The Mishnah says, "The
Sanhedrin, which so often as once in seven years, condemns a man to death, is a slaughterhouse" (Makhoth).

4. *Mode of trial.* The mode of trial in capital cases is something to be considered more completely in our subsequent study of Jesus' actual trial. But we may note here a few basic requirements. First, it was to be conducted between the offering of the morning sacrifice and the offering of the evening sacrifice, that is, in daylight and with a reminder

that all that was done was to be done within the clear view of God and by those who stood in a proper relationship to him. Second, the judges were never to seek to condemn the accused but were by contrast to take his side and seek every means for his acquittal. Third, the accused could not be convicted by a bare majority; rather, a majority of two (that is 37 of the total of 71 judges) was necessary. Fourth, by strange contrast, a unanimous vote for condemnation was also invalid; for this was judged to be an emotional decision based on mob action. Fifth, the initial guilty vote and the sentence could not be pronounced on the same day. Thus, assuming that the trial had led to condemnation, the assembly was then adjourned while each man went home to consider if something had not been overlooked that could bring acquittal. Only after a night had passed and the court was reassembled and a new vote taken, could the sentence be passed and the execution follow.

Even then delays were sought. Chandler writes: "If a majority of at least two votes were registered against him, he stood convicted a second time. But the humane and indulgent spirit of Hebrew law continued to operate and deferred immediate sentence. The judges continued to deliberate. No one thought of quitting the judgment hall on the second day of the trial. No one ate anything, no one drank anything on this second day. ...All the merciful tendencies of
Talmudic interpretation were invoked and pleaded by the judges, the defenders of the accused. It was hoped that a few hours' time would discover facts favorable to the doomed man. New arguments, it was thought, might be offered and new witnesses might be forthcoming in his behalf."

Even as the death march left the great hall of the Sanhedrin, the judges would continue to seek for new arguments. If one occurred, the procession was immediately recalled and the new evidence considered.

Deceitful Hearts

The point of this is that Jesus was not condemned under a primitive, barbaric, or even inadequate judicial system, but under the best. He, the

righteous One—the One who on one occasion demanded which of his enemies was able to convict him of sin and left them speechless—was condemned to death by the most merciful and careful system of judicial processes known to our race. If we ask, as we must, "But how could that happen? How could the very Son of God be condemned?" the answer is simply that the problem, then as now, is not so much in the system itself as it is in the hearts of those who interpret and implement the system and its codes. The human heart is "deceitful above all things and beyond cure," as Jeremiah once wrote (Jer. 17:9). It is this that circumvents the law or (as in this case) actually uses the law to destroy the innocent.

Can anything cure this sickness? Nothing human certainly! But what is impossible for men is possible for God, and it was to accomplish precisely this that Christ came. He, the innocent One, was condemned for those who were guilty. Moreover, he was condemned that they, who were sinners, might be made righteous. We are such men and women. In their shoes we too would condemn the innocent. But Jesus died for us. He redeemed us in order that we might be delivered from sin and its consequences and henceforth live for him.

Chapter 227.
The Charge against the Prisoner

John 18:19-24

If their conduct were not so reprehensible and their character so base, one could almost feel sorry for the leaders of the Sanhedrin as they assembled on the night of April 5, A.D. 30, to convict Jesus of Nazareth of crimes worthy of death. For one thing, they were obviously unprepared for the trial. If they had planned to arrest and try Jesus at this Passover, they would have done it earlier in the week when they would have had the necessary time required for such a trial under Jewish law. But instead they acted suddenly and at a relatively late hour.

That they did so was due only to the message brought to them from the upper room by Judas; but this, as we have seen, found them unprepared.

Again, there was the matter of witnesses. Where, in Jerusalem in the middle of the night, were they to find witnesses to Jesus' alleged crimes? The judges could not be witnesses themselves. Jewish law prohibited this. Witnesses would have to be rounded up quickly from those who might have heard Christ say some incriminating thing, but this would have to be done with the knowledge that the best witnesses to Christ's speech and actions were probably scattered all over the country in those many towns and villages where Jesus had conducted his itinerant ministry. Moreover, even when these witnesses were found, they would still have to provide evidence according to the strict demands of Jewish law.

Perhaps in the sudden excitement of the moment the elders, priests, and scribes thought that Jesus, being shocked and overcome by the arrest, might possibly prove his own accuser. But their hopes along this line were quickly disabused, as John, the only Gospel writer who records the first segment of the Jewish trial, the segment before Annas, indicates. Annas conducted what we would call a preliminary hearing. He asked Jesus about his disciples and his doctrine. Jesus refused to answer this series of questions, thereby indicating that he knew Jewish law—that accusations must come from witnesses and not from the accused—and that he therefore intended to be tried properly (if at all) by the laws of Israel.

John reports him as saying, "I have spoken openly to the world, I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said" (18:20-21). This was not an evasive answer, though it may sound so to us. It was merely a demand to be tried properly.

It becomes clear at this point that the court was partial. For although Jesus had spoken correctly and according to his right under law, one of the court officers immediately turned and struck him for what he

considered to be Christ's impudence. "Is that any way to answer the high priest?" he demanded. Instead of replying angrily Jesus merely repeated his previous position. If there had been any wrongdoing, it should be brought forward legally and established by witnesses. If not, even the blow he had received was improper.

Christ before Caiaphas

We do not know much about Annas, who conducted this preliminary hearing. But I suspect, as I read the accounts, that he was just a bit more upright than his unscrupulous son-in-law, Caiaphas. At any rate, having met with an obstinate refusal by Jesus to testify against himself, and recognizing that Jesus both knew the law and would obviously not be terrified into a foolish mistake by silly court brutality, Annas assumed that there was nothing more that he could do and so sent the prisoner to Caiaphas. John indicates this in verse 24.

At this point, although John does not record it, the serious part of the trial began. It is this segment that the synoptic Gospels give us (Matt. 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54). Caiaphas presided.

There were many illegalities in Christ's trial, as we are going to show in our next study, but underneath the many illegalities ran a strong undercurrent of legality in the sense of formal adherence to certain points of law. One of these was the calling of witnesses. Mark says that many "testified falsely against him," adding, "their statements did not agree" (Mark 14:56). Matthew declares, "The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any though many false witnesses came forward" (Matt. 26:59-60). Apparently, there was a search for testimony that might have condemned Jesus, but the priests could not procure it. Clearly, valuable time was wasted in these fruitless accusations.

In Three Days

There were three categories of testimony according to the Mishnah: a vain testimony, a standing testimony, and an adequate testimony. The first of these, a vain testimony, referred to accusations that were obviously irrelevant or worthless and were therefore eliminated at once. This would be the kind of testimony which in our courts is "stricken from the record" and which the jury is instructed to "disregard." The second class of testimony, a standing testimony, is testimony with substance and relevance. It is permitted to stand until confirmed or disproved. The last category refers to evidence in which the witnesses agree together. This alone is "adequate" to convict.

According to this division, it is clear that the first accusations (the accusations of many "false witnesses") were vain testimony and hence were not even admitted provisionally. But at last two men came forward with a very explicit piece of evidence which at once put the trial on a new and promising footing. Matthew says that two accused him of saying, "I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days" (26:60-61). Mark says that they gave this false testimony: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man'" (14:57-58). This accusation was obviously of great importance.

In the first place, it was apparently true. At least, there was an element of truth in it. The fact that there were two witnesses who testified to substantially the same thing is one indication of its truthfulness. But in addition to this, in one of those unintentional and therefore particularly striking corroborations of one or more Gospels by another, John actually gives the incident in which these words were spoken. He says that on the occasion of the first cleansing of the temple, Jesus, when asked for a sign, replied, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days," to which John then remarks, "But the temple he had spoken of was his body" (John 2:19, 21). We notice that although John does not refer to this incident in his own account of the trial, as we might expect him to do, he nevertheless gives us a piece of narration that fits the situation in the other Gospels perfectly. For this was spoken in the courtyard of the temple in Jerusalem and thus before the very

types of people who were likely even at this late date still to be hanging around the temple in the service of the scribes and priests.

The second reason why this particular accusation was important in the eyes of the priests is that it was also of a serious nature. It was the kind of accusation which if substantiated would result in the penalty of death. It might be construed as sorcery, for no one could tear the temple down and then rebuild it in three days without what we might call "black magic." Again, it could also be construed as sacrilege, for the temple was the holiest place in Israel. The penalty for both of these crimes was death.

As I reflect on this charge, however, I cannot help but feel that Frank Morison is right when he suggests that there was probably more to the issue. For one thing, in spite of the various wordings used to report this saying of Jesus, the highly unlikely phrase "in three days" occurs in them all. Moreover, this is a phrase that Jesus had used on other occasions in which it was perfectly clear that he was prophesying that his resurrection would occur three days after he would be put to death. Are we to think that these statements were unknown to the high priests? Are we to think that a man as shrewd as Caiaphas was not aware of what Jesus' enigmatic saying implied? I cannot doubt that they understood precisely what he was claiming, even though they may not have had it in a form sufficiently clear to condemn him legally. They knew that he had said in effect, "You will kill me, but I will prove my divine nature and authority by rising from the dead on the third day."

After his own careful development of this position, Morison says this, "I see no escape from the logic of that conclusion. We may hold that He was mistaken; that He was held by some strange mental obsession which periodically flashed out in His public utterance. But that He said this singular and almost unbelievable thing seems to me to be very nearly beyond the possibility of doubt."

That the high priests thus understood Jesus should be demonstrated alone by their later concern to have the tomb guarded. Matthew tells us that this occurred after the crucifixion. "The next day, the one after

Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 'Sir,' they said, 'we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, "After three days I will rise again." So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first'" (27:62-64).

So the essence of the accusation of the two witnesses was that Jesus had claimed to be God and that he was able to prove this by his own resurrection. It was a damaging accusation, a fatal one. And yet—and here is a striking fact—this testimony was legally overthrown.

Oath of the Testimony

We are not told why the testimony was overthrown. It may have been on the basis of the slight variations we have already noted ("I am able to destroy the temple" in Matthew, "I will destroy this ... temple" in Mark, "Destroy this temple" in John). It may have been that the witnesses could not agree on the exact place where the words were spoken or when they were spoken. After all, they had been spoken three years earlier. There may have been other inconsistencies. What we do know is that in spite of its essential accuracy the testimony did not stand. And what we can infer on that basis is the seething anger and frustration of the presiding officer, Caiaphas.

Caiaphas was in a difficult position. He had taken a chance on arresting Jesus at a very late hour in Passover week and was therefore committed to conducting a quick trial during the course of this one night after which he would present the judgment of the Jewish court for ratification by Pilate in the morning. If he failed, it would be a disaster. Word of the trial would leak to the population, and Christ's prestige and authority would undoubtedly rise to the same degree that the prestige and authority of the Jewish court would tumble. Besides all this, Caiaphas really did have a case. Jesus had claimed to be God's Son in a unique way, thus making himself liable to the penalty of death for blasphemy. Jesus was guilty when judged on the presuppositions of the Jewish court. Yet—this was the real frustration—Caiaphas could not procure a

legal condemnation. He was close. He was right. Yet the situation was slipping from his grasp.

At this point Caiaphas revealed that shrewdness of character and determination for which the Romans had undoubtedly made him the chief Jewish ruler. What he did was illegal, but it was a stroke of genius politically. Seeing that the case was dissolving before his eyes, he abruptly turned to interrogate the prisoner himself, demanding of him on the basis of the most solemn form of oath known to Israel, the famous Oath of the Testimony, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. 26:63).

It was a brilliant stroke for several reasons. For one thing, the oath was brilliant. Although Jesus was not compelled to give evidence against himself, being a pious Jew he would not refuse such a solemn challenge and therefore replied, "It is as you say. But I say to you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (v. 64). The substance of the charge was also brilliant. If Caiaphas had merely asked Jesus if he was the Christ or Messiah, he could have answered yes without jeopardy, for it was not a capital offense to make such a claim. Time would itself prove that the claim was either false or true. Or again, if Caiaphas had merely asked Jesus if he was the Son of God, Jesus could also have answered yes without danger. For, as he indicated on another occasion, all Jews had a right to be called sons of God (cf. John 10:33-36). However, by combining the two, Caiaphas interpreted the one term by the other, thereby asking in effect, not whether Jesus was a mere human messiah or else a son of God in the general Jewish sense, but whether he was a divine Messiah. When Jesus answered yes to that accusation, he was immediately convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death.

Savior or Judge?

The Jewish trial exposes the true nature of the hearts of men and women. We tend to look upon our own natures as being essentially good. But this is not the way God views them, and a trial like this brings out our nature. Jeremiah says of man, "The heart is deceitful

above all things and beyond cure" (17:9). This does not mean, according to biblical teaching, that we are all as evil as we could possibly be. Given enough time and opportunity we could all be much worse. But it does mean that the roots of even the most heinous crimes ever perpetrated in the history of the world are within us and that, being placed in a situation similar to that of others who did these things, we have nothing within to hinder us from doing likewise.

The trial of Jesus also reminds us of his claims and promises. True, Jesus was condemned illegally. We will look at some of the illegalities in more detail in our next study. But still, the issues themselves were the right issues, and the claims for which he was convicted were real claims. He had made three of them. He had claimed to be God. He had claimed that he would rise from the dead after three days. He had claimed that he would return again in judgment. Are these claims true? The resurrection was true. If it was true, Jesus was also obviously who he claimed to be, for God would not have vindicated his claim to be the unique Son of God if this was blasphemy. Indeed, the final judgment is proved by the resurrection. For as Paul said to the Greeks in Athens, " [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

So the question is not whether the claims of Jesus of Nazareth are true but rather how we ourselves will respond to them and therefore also how we will greet him when he comes. Will we greet him as those who, like the rulers of his day, attempted to banish his presence from their lives? Or will we greet him as those for whom he died and who trust him as the only wise God and our Savior?

Chapter 228.
Illegalities of Christ's Trial

John 18:19-24

In *Jesus: The Man Who Lives,* England's great scourge of the establishment, Malcolm Muggeridge, said some cynical things about justice. He called it "another of the world's great fantasies." He wrote, "To call for justice in this world (which Jesus never once did; nor did He at any point give any indication of expecting justice, or, in any of His reported utterances, so much as mention the word) amounts in practice to calling for something which by its nature cannot be just—viz, law. To cry out for justice in human terms is as foolish as calling for iced water in the middle of the Sahara. From men we can look for mercy and pity, and, thanks to Jesus, from God for forgiveness; but Justice—never!... If we were capable of rendering or receiving justice we should need no laws to codify injustice; no parliamentarians to make laws, lawyers to argue them, police to enforce them, revolutionaries to reject them with a view to remaking them in due course, prisons and executioners to dispose of all who refuse to abide by them. 'I only care for justice,' is the cry of every counterfeiter, whether of the hopes, the fears, or just the cash wherewith we live. By comparison with asking for justice, the moon is a trifle, eternity a throwaway line, and happiness on ready sale at every supermarket."

I do not know whether these cynical but witty remarks are justified—though Muggeridge has certainly had more opportunity to observe the workings of this world's justice than I have. But I do know that his remarks are amply justified in the case of the trial of Jesus, for the laws governing his case were broken so many times that it is difficult to see how the trial could have been more illegally run or the laws of Israel more thoroughly flouted.

The Arrest

The first area of illegality in the trial of Jesus is from the period immediately preceding the trial, that is, the arrest. Here three separate errors were committed: (1) the arrest was by night, (2) the arrest was achieved through the agency of a traitor and informer, and (3) the arrest was without the necessary basis of a specific and formal accusation of wrongdoing later to be presented to the court. These related errors

should have resulted in an immediate acquittal of Jesus, even if no further errors had been made. The situation was similar to the way in which a case should be thrown out of an American court if, for example, the arresting officer had neglected to inform the suspect of his rights, a confession was coerced, evidence was gathered by illegal entry or seizure, or some other illegal act was done.

The matter of *trial by night* is quite clear, for it was an established and inflexible rule that proceedings in capital cases could not be conducted at night. Moreover, this restriction did not apply merely to the trial itself but also to the events leading up to it, particularly the arrest. We know that the arrest of Jesus was after dark, for in addition to the time elements of that night, which we have already carefully considered, there is the simple fact that the arresting party arrived in the Garden of Gethsemane with "torches, lanterns and weapons" (John 18:3).

The law bearing upon *the role of Judas* in the arrest is derived from Leviticus 19:16, which says, "Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the Lord." This meant that a witness had to be of good character and, moreover, could not bear witness against a close companion, friend, or relative. He was, of course, also forbidden to take a bribe. He could not be an accessory or accomplice. Judas was all these. So it was illegal for him to have been used in the way he was used in the arrest.

There is a contrast here with modern law, for in most Western law the use of accomplice testimony is allowed, though viewed with distrust. In England, according to Chandler, conviction for a crime may rest on the uncorroborated testimony of an accomplice after the jury has been warned that such testimony is to be closely scrutinized. In the United States the testimony of an accomplice is also admissible, but it must be corroborated at some points by other testimony if it is to stand. From the point of view of securing a conviction it is clear that the use of accomplice testimony is of great value, as the frequent practice of granting immunity to force the testimony of an accomplice indicates. Yet, in spite of the obvious value of such testimony, Hebrew law forbade it. As Chandler says, "The arrest of Jesus was ordered upon the

supposition that he was a criminal; this same supposition would have made Judas, who had aided, encouraged, and abetted Jesus in the propagation of his faith, an accomplice. If Judas was not an accomplice, Jesus was innocent, and his arrest was an outrage, and therefore illegal."

The third illegal aspect of the arrest was the lack of a formal accusation on the basis of which the later trial was to be conducted. Legally, Judas should have made that accusation to the authorities in advance of the arrest and then have appeared in court to sustain it. This was not done. Instead, the opening part of the trial was a nearly unsuccessful attempt to find precisely this accusation.

The Private Examination

The second area of illegality in the arrest and trial of Jesus was the private appearance before Annas. From the nature of the arrest we can well understand why this examination took place. There was no real case against Jesus, and this was an attempt to secure one from the prisoner's own testimony. Still it was illegal, and that for several reasons: (1) it was by night, which we have already seen to be forbidden; (2) it was by a single judge, which was also forbidden (The Pirke Aboth, a part of the Mishnah, says, "Be not a sole judge, for there is no sole judge but One"); and (3) the accused was never to be compelled to testify. Jesus was entirely within his rights when he refused to answer the interrogations (cf. John 18:19-23).

The Charge

The Sanhedrin knew that Jesus was claiming to be the unique Son of God. If this was not true, as they believed it was not, it was a form of blasphemy punishable by death. On the other hand, whether the charge was true or not, the difficulties growing out of the late hour and the conflicting testimony of the witnesses provoked the court into demonstrably illegal proceedings.

One illegality was that there was *no formal indictment* against Jesus. This should have been the basis for the arrest. It should have been presented at the start of the trial by the two or more witnesses needed to

establish guilt in Jewish legal proceedings. But there was no charge. Instead, much valuable time was wasted trying to find one. The first accusations were thrown out of court as being irrelevant, unsupported, or silly. The more serious charge that Jesus had claimed to be able to destroy the temple and build it up again in three days was also likewise disallowed. It was only after these attempts had failed that a condemnation was secured on the basis of Jesus' direct reply to a question placed to him under oath by Caiaphas.

Moreover, it was *not Caiaphas's place to* do this. In fact, anything of this nature was expressly forbidden. The high priest was not allowed to express an opinion or interrogate either the witnesses or the accused. Rather, he was to keep perfectly silent. When the balloting was taken, he was to vote last, for his prestige was considered to be so great that any opinion expressed by him might be imagined to sway the other members of the Sanhedrin. Caiaphas violated all these restrictions when he intruded into the proceedings by asking Jesus, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. 26:63).

The Trial Itself

The trial itself was illegal on numerous grounds: (1) it was conducted at night, (2) it was conducted on the day before a Jewish Sabbath, (3) it was completed in one twenty-four-hour period, (4) it secured a conviction on the basis of the defendant's own confession, and (5) it concluded with a unanimous and therefore invalid verdict.

The basic rule for *trial by daylight* rather than at night is from the tractate "Sanhedrin" of the
Mishnah: "Let a capital offense be tried during the day, but suspend it at night" (Sanhedrin 4, 1). This was not done, as we have seen. Although there had been no plans to arrest and try Jesus at this particular Passover, this had been altered by the report of Judas that Jesus would be in the Garden until a late hour and would be (so we may suppose the report of Judas to have been) in an arrestable mood. There would have been much excitement among Caiaphas, Annas, and the other priests at

this news. But how could they arrest Jesus, conduct a trial, and have him condemned before the beginning of Passover on the day following? Legally it could not be done. There was not enough time. But they decided that they could squeeze the necessary procedures in if they held the trial that night and simply confirmed the verdict formally at dawn.

Chandler writes, "It will be seen that this determination to arrest and try Jesus at night, in violation of law, became the parent of nearly every legal outrage that was committed against him. The selection of the midnight hour for such a purpose resulted not merely in a technical infraction of law, but rendered it impossible to do justice either formally or substantially under rules of Hebrew criminal procedure."

It was another requirement of the Jewish law, particularly in capital cases, that no court could lawfully meet on a Sabbath or other feast day, nor *on a day preceding a Sabbath or a feast day.* According to Jewish law, no work could be done on a Sabbath. Yet a trial was work, and so was the execution that would inevitably follow if the accused were found guilty. In Western law a trial may be suspended. But a trial could not be suspended in Jewish law, except for the one night that was to intervene between the first and second of the required hearings in a capital case. Thus, a trial was not to be started if it could not finish before a Sabbath. In Jesus' case this was not done. Moreover, not only was Jesus tried on a day preceding a Sabbath; he also was tried on a feast day, for the Feast of Unleavened Bread had begun by the time he was arrested.

The trial was also illegal because it was concluded *within the space of one day.* We remember that according to Jewish law there were actually to be two trials. On the first day, the entire case was to be heard and the first of two votes taken. If the accused was found innocent, the trial ended at that point. If he was found guilty, the trial was suspended for the night while the judges reconsidered the evidence and tried to find some way by which the accused (and now condemned) man might be exonerated. Only after a night like this did they return to the judgment hall and retry the case. Every attempt was made to secure acquittal. It was only in the afternoon of this second day that a second vote was

taken after which, if the vote was still for condemnation, execution followed.

It is true, according to the Gospel records, that there were two trials and thus a semblance of legality—one at night and one in the early morning. But they were not on separate days; in fact, they were within a few hours of each other. And, equally important, the reason for the day's delay—to allow the judges to have time to retire to their homes for discussion, prayer, and meditation—was frustrated. Nor did they carefully retry the case in the short space of time allotted by the morning hours.

Fourth, the trial was illegal because it secured a condemnation of Jesus on the basis of *his own confession* produced under oath.

Fifth, the condemnation of Jesus was illegal because *the vote of the Sanhedrin was unanimous,* which by Hebrew law should have resulted in an acquittal. Mark tells us, "They *all* condemned him as worthy of death" (14:64). This, of course, is a strange part of Jewish law, particularly to those in the English-speaking world who are accustomed to precisely the opposite; that is, the requirement for a unanimous vote to convict under trial by jury. But this strangeness does not mean that it is foolish or even unwise. Chandler presents the reasoning as follows, "In the first place ... there were no lawyers or advocates, in the modern sense, among the ancient Hebrews. The judges were his defenders. Now if the verdict was unanimous in favor of condemnation, it was evident that the prisoner had had no friend or defender in court. To the Jewish mind this was almost equivalent to mob violence. It argued conspiracy at least. The element of mercy, which was required to enter into every Hebrew verdict, was absent in such a case." Whether wise or unwise, this was the law in Israel, and it was violated on this occasion.

No Defense

One last area of illegality may be considered. It is in some ways the most obvious of all: there was no defense of the prisoner. That there should be a defense is such an obvious part of legal proceedings—it is a

right under most enlightened systems of justice—that its absence in this case immediately calls the entire activity of the court in question and renders it more the outworking of the hate of the authorities against Jesus than a true trial.

Were there none in Israel, none in Jerusalem even at this late hour on the eve of Passover, who could have testified to Christ's character? Were there none who could have borne witness to his ability to perform miracles in fulfillment of the Jewish prophecies concerning the coming Messiah? Were there no judges to plead the Old Testament and Christ's fulfillment of it in his defense? As we said, there is no need to think that the priests would necessarily have been persuaded by this evidence. But regardless of this, their refusal to consider a defense was nothing less than a failure to do their duty. It was a surrender to manipulation and mob rule.

What the priests, scribes, and elders did on the occasion of Christ's trial is not so different from what men and women are doing even today. Christ is proclaimed as the unique Son of God, but millions reject this while refusing to hear his defense. There is a defense. It is presented regularly in countless Christian churches, on radio and television programs, in books, and other forms of communication. But they will not hear it. They will not go to church. They will not read Christian literature. They turn the radio and television off or watch an entertainment channel.

What shall we say of such people? Are they honest? No more than Caiaphas! Are they wise?

Hardly! For if Jesus is who he claimed to be, the fact is a matter of life and death to all people.

Have you heard the prisoner? Have you considered his defense? If you have not, I challenge you to do so. The next chapter will help get you started. If you have, why wait? Come to him now. Believe on him. Jesus was either a megalomaniac, a deceiver, or the Son of God. If he is the Son of God, he should be your Savior.

Chapter 229.
In the Prisoner's Defense

John 18:19-24

The standards that human beings have developed for the administration of justice have varied widely in the long history of the race and from place to place, but there is one standard without which no sane person would attempt to establish justice at all. It is the right of the accused to a defense. We may imagine a situation in which a mother comes into the house to find that her child has used his brand new set of paints to decorate the living-room walls with murals. We may imagine further that she had specifically told him just the day before that he was to paint on paper only. She cannot imagine any possible words or circumstances that could in any way justify the disaster. She may be determined to punish him. But still she does not proceed to a spanking until she has at least heard her son's defense. "Why have you painted on the walls?" she might ask. "Why did you disregard my warning that you were only to paint on paper?"

So obvious is the right of the accused to a defense that this is observed both formally and informally in virtually every system of law and justice known. If the defense is omitted, the judicial proceedings are not actually a trial but are rather a mob action, no matter what legal formalities may or may not be included.

A Question Not Asked

So we ask, "What was the defense of Jesus of Nazareth in his trial by the Jewish Sanhedrin in Judea nearly two thousand years ago?" The answer is that there was no defense at all. This basic right of the accused was omitted.

We have to say at the beginning that if the proper requirements of Jewish law had been followed, as they should have been, there would have been no need for a defense for the simple reason that the trial would never have proceeded this far. His arrest was illegal, as we have

already seen. It was by night, which Jewish law forbade. It was through the agency of an accomplice and informer. There had been no formal charge upon which the warrant for arrest had been issued. Each of these illegalities should have resulted in an immediate end to the prosecution and release of the prisoner if proper procedures had been followed. Again, the conduct of the trial was illegal. It was by night. Those who should have been Christ's defenders became his accusers. The high priest intervened, which he had no right to do. Most important of all, there was no proven charge against the prisoner. He was convicted in the end only because he voluntarily answered a question put to him by the high priest in which he claimed to be the divine Son of God and the Messiah.

But assuming that everything had been legal up to this point, which it was not—assuming that the arrest had been properly executed upon proper warrant, that charges had been properly filed and established under cross-examination, that these charges had related to Christ's claim to be God's unique Son, the Messiah—what was the next legal step under Hebrew law? Assuming that a *prima facie* case of guilt had been made, what should the judges have done next after hearing the case against him? The answer is that they should have begun to inquire diligently into all matters pertaining to the truth or falsity of his claim. In other words, the greatest illegality of the trial of Jesus was the question not asked. For having heard Christ's statement that he was indeed "the Christ, the Son of God," the high priest should then have asked, "What sign do you have then, that we may see and believe you?" The absence of this question reveals the trial to be a judicial murder rather than a fair inquiry into Christ's innocence or guilt.

We must not suppose that even if they had heard a defense the judges of Israel would have been obliged to accept it. They might have ruled it inadequate or false. But they are to blame, not because of the verdict itself (save that they reached it before the trial even began), but because they denied Jesus all defense whatsoever.

Messianic Prophecies

What defense could be given? One might imagine that the very nature of Christ's claims would put them beyond the realm either of falsification or verification. But this is not the case. We remember that the accusation was twofold: Jesus had falsely claimed to be (1) the Messiah and (2) the unique Son of God. These are religious claims made against the background of the revealed law of Israel, the Old Testament, which both Jesus and his accusers recognized to be determinative. Did Jesus' claims fit in with what the Old Testament taught? On that matter the judges of Israel were not only competent but were obligated to make judgment.

How should this trial have gone if this proper line of defense had been followed? Clearly, there should have been a defense of Christ's claim to be the Messiah, followed by a defense of his claim to be the unique Son of God. The first part might have gone like this.

1. According to the Jewish Scriptures, *the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, and Jesus was born in Bethlehem.* The relevant passage for this point is Micah 5:2, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times." The proof of Jesus' having been born in Bethlehem could have been established even at this very late hour by numerous witnesses, including that of no less a person than his mother, who was in Jerusalem at the time of the trial. It was also in the official Roman records; for the trip to Bethlehem (in connection with which Jesus was born) was made at the demand of Rome in order to provide a census, and Jesus would have been registered at that time.

Luke was to tell about it later, saying, "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to

be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:1-7).

2. *The Messiah was to be born of a virgin, and Jesus was so born.* Isaiah was the one who recorded this prophecy. He wrote, 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). No doubt, the reality of a virgin birth would be a hard point to convince these leaders of, just as it is hard to convince many of it today. But Mary, even if no one else, would have testified to it had she been called as a witness. Presumably she at least told Luke, for Luke (as also Matthew) included it in his account of the days preceding the birth in Bethlehem (Luke 1:26-30; cf. Matt. 1:24-25).

3. *The Messiah was to be born of the house of David, and Jesus was so born.* All Jews understood this to be the nature of the promise made to David himself, recorded in 2 Samuel 7, "When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom.... Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (vv. 12, 16). However, lest there be any doubt that it was indeed the Messiah who was in view in this prophecy, the later prophets made it most clear. Jeremiah wrote, 'The days are coming... when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a king who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness" (Jer. 23:5-6). Similarly, Isaiah had written, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD" (11:1-2).

Was Jesus of the house of David? A short inquiry would quickly have shown that this was so. Moreover, a careful inquiry would have shown that not only was he descended from David through his natural mother, Mary, by whom he had a legal claim to the throne, he was also descended from David by virtue of his adoption by Joseph, who was in a different but royal line of descent. In other words, Jesus was descended from David by both his natural mother and adopted father, thereby exhausting both lines, so that, if he is not the Messiah, there is at any rate no other. All this could have been investigated by the Sanhedrin just as it later was by Matthew, who gives Joseph's genealogy, and by Luke, who gives the genealogy of Mary.

4. *The appearance of the Messiah was to be preceded by a forerunner, who was to be like Elijah.* This was spoken of in the last two chapters of the Old Testament. "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come" (Mal. 3:1). "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes"

(Mal. 4:5). John the Baptist was this forerunner. Jesus himself so identified him (Matt. 17:1213), and this was John's own testimony when an official delegation was sent to him by members of this very Sanhedrin (John 1:19-24).

5. *The Messiah was to do many great works and miracles, and Jesus had performed the prophesied miracles and more.* Isaiah had written, "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor" (61:1-2). "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy" (35:5-6). Jesus referred to these texts himself in regard to his own ministry

and clearly regarded them as sufficient proof of his messianic claims (Luke 4:16-21; Matt. 11:1-
6).

We know that the leaders of the Sanhedrin accepted the factualness of these miracles; for, although they had attempted to deny them at first, it was actually their fear that all would follow Jesus because of his miracles that caused them to arrest, try, and condemn him (John 11:47-50).

6. *It was prophesied that the Messiah would make a public entry into Jerusalem riding on a donkey, and this Jesus had done.* No one could deny this fact. It had happened in full view of the residents of Jerusalem just three days before. The prophecy was in Zechariah: "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9).

7. *It was prophesied that the Messiah should be betrayed by a close friend for thirty pieces of silver.* "Even my close friend, who I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (Ps. 41:9). "So they paid me thirty pieces of silver" (Zech. 11:12). In an ironical twist, the leaders of the Sanhedrin were in the process of fulfilling this prophecy themselves that very night by using Judas as an informant (Matt. 26:14-15; 27:3-8).

8. *The Messiah was to be a man of poverty and suffering in his first advent and was to be despised and rejected by the leaders of Israel, as Jesus was.* Isaiah had foretold it, "He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (53:2-3). The Sanhedrin was fulfilling this prophecy even at the moment of the trial. They were despising Christ. They were

rejecting him. Yet so far were they from any impartial presentation of the evidence or any desire to hear his defense that this strange irony escaped them.

God's Son

There was another part to the accusation on the basis of which Jesus was executed. This is his claim to be the unique Son of God. How could this be defended? We remember as we ask this question that as Jesus used the phrase he was not using the words "Son of God" in some general sense in which all men or at least all religious men might be supposed to share. He was using it in an exclusive way, meaning that he was of the same essence as God, whom he termed Father, and that he therefore possessed the same attributes and exercised the same authority as Jehovah. This was a most shocking claim to those steeped in the Judaism of Christ's day, of course. It ran against everything they believed concerning the unity and transcendence of God. It seemed blasphemous and abhorrent. But the claim, abhorrent as it may have been, was not so inconceivable that they could not have asked in all fairness whether anything of this nature could possibly be suggested by the Scriptures of Israel. Again, this does not mean that they would necessarily have accepted Christ's claims, even if the Old Testament suggested their possibility. But it does mean that he should not have been condemned out of hand without the benefit of this defense and inquiry.

Walter Chandler, from whom I have borrowed much of this material, writes, "What the judges of the Sanhedrin should have done in examining the merits of the defense of Jesus was: 1) to consider whether, in the light of Hebrew scripture and tradition, a god of flesh and bone, representing the second person of a Duality or a Trinity of gods, was possible; 2) to weigh thoroughly the claims of Jesus, in the light of testimony properly adduced at the trial, that he was this second person of a Duality or Trinity of gods."

In defense of this claim we may make the following three points:

1. *There are references in the Old Testament to precisely the kind of unique Son of God that Jesus claimed to be.* A clear reference is Isaiah 9:6, where one who was to be born into the human family is called "The Mighty God." "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Similarly, Psalm 2, which is to be understood as a messianic prophecy, declares of the coming Messiah, "He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'" (v. 7). What could possibly be clearer than the statement of this psalm that the Messiah was to be a person uniquely begotten of God the Father? What could more clearly suggest a human being who was at the same time God than Isaiah's prophecy that the coming Messiah was to be called "The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father"? We may readily admit that this is hard to understand. We may not see how an individual can be both God and man at the same time. But the point is not whether or not we understand it but whether the Scriptures, which the Jewish leaders and Christ both fully accepted, teach it. If they do, then the claim of Jesus to be God's unique Son cannot be rejected outright.

2. *The Old Testament also speaks of an incarnation*, that is, God becoming flesh. This is what Isaiah speaks of in the verse cited earlier: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" (7:14). Immanuel means "God with us." So the prophecy is that God should become man by means of a virgin birth. Again, we may have great difficulty in understanding this, even in believing it. But the point is that, whether we believe it or not, this is at least what the Old Testament teaches and is what Jesus claimed.

3. *There are significant passages in the Old Testament in which Jehovah (or the Son of Jehovah) is portrayed as having appeared on earth among men.* One example is the appearance of an individual called "the angel of the LORD" to Hagar. The passage reads, "The angel added, 'I will so increase your descendents that

> they will be too numerous to count.' The angel of the LORD also said to her, 'You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard your misery.'... She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: 'You are the God who sees me,' for she said, 'I have now seen the one who sees me'" (Gen. 16:10-11, 13). We should not infer that the phrase "angel of the LORD" in the Old Testament always refers to God himself, but that is certainly the meaning here. For the one who appeared to Hagar as an angel spoke as God, and Hagar addressed him in this way, saying, "I have now seen the one who sees me"

Again, there are appearances of a similar figure or figures to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. On one occasion, we are told, "The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, 'If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord..." (Gen. 18:1-3). In the account that follows, these figures sometimes appear as three, sometimes as one; always they speak as if they were themselves God: "Then the LORD said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh?'" (v. 13), "Then the LORD said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?'" (v. 17), "The LORD said, 'If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake'" (v. 26). The language of this story indicates that Abraham firmly believed that Jehovah had appeared to him and become a guest in his tent. The question may be asked, as Chandler does, "If Abraham could not recognize Jehovah, who could or can?"

The point of these passages is that the Old Testament contains references to the appearances of God on earth in human form, that the appearance of the Second Person of the Godhead was prophesied, and that Jesus amply met every reasonable test that might be raised to determine whether or not he was this one. This defense might not have convinced the Jewish rulers of Christ's innocence, even if it had been presented. But it was a reasonable and adequate defense,

reasonable in that it was based on the clear teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures and adequate in that it was sufficient to create "reasonable doubt" of Christ's guilt, if not, in fact, ample evidence that he was indeed who he declared himself to be.

Who Is He?

If it is true that the Sanhedrin was guilty for its refusal to hear the defense of Jesus, how much more guilty are people who refuse to consider his claims and defense today. More guilty? Yes, more guilty even than the Sanhedrin. For although it is true that these men willfully refused to consider even a shred of evidence in Jesus' defense, they nevertheless did not have before them that greatest of all evidences for his divinity that we have today: his miraculous resurrection from the dead. Nor did they have available the full teaching of the New Testament and the works of the many doctors and theologians of the Christian church who have, since their time, clearly presented who Jesus is, why he came to die, the meaning of his resurrection, and the need for the response of faith that people are called on to make to him. That evidence is available to you, whoever you may be. If you reject it or, worse yet, refuse even to consider it, your guilt is greater than the guilt of the Jewish Sanhedrin. But if, on the other hand, you will consider it and accept it, it is sufficient by the power of the Holy Spirit to lead you to saving faith in Jesus. Who is Jesus? He is the Messiah, the Son of God. He is your Savior.

Chapter 230.
Before the Cock Crows

John 18:15-18, 25-27

I seldom come to this story of the denial of the Lord Jesus Christ by Peter that I do not think of two passages from other books in the Bible. They are unrelated technically. Yet they are related, for they indicate in advance the two most important lessons to be learned from Peter's

temptation. One is from the first psalm. It is the verse that describes the folly of the man who "walks" in the counsel of the ungodly and "stands" in the way of sinners and "sits" in the seat of the mockers (v. 1). This describes Peter. The psalm describes him as well when it goes on to add that the man who lives like this is "like the chaff which the wind blows away" (v. 4). Peter, like chaff, was certainly blown about by the temptation that came to him while he warmed himself at the fire in the high priest's house.

It was a bad place to be, and Peter certainly paid the price of being there. As Spurgeon writes, "Peter was on dangerous ground. When his Master was being buffeted, he was trying to make himself comfortable. We read of the high priest's servants that they warmed themselves, and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself. He stood with them, and they were rough servants of ill masters. He was in bad company, and he was a man who could not afford to be in bad company; for he was so impulsive, and so easily provoked to rash actions."

On the other hand, whenever I think of Peter's denial, I also think of that prophecy of Christ's concerning Peter that is recorded in Luke's Gospel. There Jesus says, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (22:31-32). This teaches us that although Peter, like the ungodly man of Psalm 1, would be blown about like chaff at threshing time, nevertheless Jesus had prayed for Peter with the result that Peter would come forth stronger from the experience. That is, the chaff in Peter would be blown away. But the Peter whom God had recreated by means of the new birth would be strengthened.

We should be strengthened too. We shall be if we can learn from Peter's mistakes. Do you think that you do not need to learn? If that is the case, then you of all people need to, for John has undoubtedly intertwined the story of Peter's fall with the story of the Jewish and Roman trials to show that even the followers of Christ are not free from guilt in their relationships to him. True, they do not hate him, like Caiaphas. They are

not indifferent to him, like Pilate. Yet they deny him many times, as Peter did.

Why is this? No doubt because we are too fond of the world and too enamored of its company. Matthew Henry once wrote, "Those that warm themselves with evil doers grow cold towards good people and good things, and those that are fond of the devil's fire-side are in danger of the devil's fire."

In Defense of Peter

In order to understand fully the importance of Peter's fall for ourselves, we need to see that it was *Peter,* the leader of the disciples, and not another who denied Jesus. If this had been Nicodemus, we should not be surprised. Nicodemus is the one who came to Jesus by night, no doubt for fear of what others might think; there is no indication in Scripture that Nicodemus ever entirely came out for him. Likewise, we would not have been surprised had this been the rich young ruler. He loved riches more than he loved Jesus and thus "went away sorrowful." We might also have expected a denial from those who watched Jesus at a distance, as many did, who never confessed him at all. A denial from any of these would have been no surprise at all. Yet this was not Nicodemus or the rich young ruler or these others. This was Peter—the bold, the courageous, the one who had told Jesus, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will" (Matt. 26:33).

The point is that if Peter fell, then anyone can fall—the strongest as well as the weakest. In fact, it may even be the strongest who are in the greatest danger.

But let us not just talk about this generally. Let us talk about specifics in the case of Peter. What can be said in Peter's defense? One thing that can be said about Peter is that *he at least followed Jesus* when all others (except possibly John) had abandoned him. True, in the Garden at the moment of the arrest they had all scattered into the enveloping darkness. But most of them undoubtedly continued their flight on up the Mount of Olives and down the other side to Bethany, where they had

been staying on each of the previous nights and where they imagined themselves to be safe. Peter, on the other hand, quickly stopped his flight and then, joining forces with the unnamed disciple (v. 15), followed the arresting party back to Jerusalem and eventually made his way into the high priest's house. This was not the decision of a coward. As Barclay says, "The tremendous thing about Peter was that his failure was a failure that could only have happened to a man of superlative courage. True, Peter failed; but he failed in a situation which none of the other disciples even dared to face. He failed, not because he was a coward, but because he was a brave man."

A second commendable characteristic follows from this one, namely, that *Peter loved Jesus.* It was for this reason alone that he followed him. I am sure that when we think of those who loved Jesus and who were in Jerusalem at this time, we think preeminently of Mary Magdalene who for love's sake alone lingered around the garden tomb after the resurrection to try to find and care for the Lord's body. We are right to think of her, for Mary truly did love him. She loved him even when her faith and hope in him had failed. But no less a motivation drew Peter to Jerusalem when all common sense dictated the safety of a nocturnal flight to Bethany. Why else did Peter follow the arresting party? Why else did he seek entry into the high priest's home? Because he loved Jesus! He wanted to know what would become of him. Thus, he failed in a situation into which he would not even have come had he not loved Jesus much.

Third, *Peter had tried to defend Jesus.* In the Garden he had drawn a sword and attacked the head of the arresting column, a man named Malchus, and had cut off his ear. This was an act of the flesh, of course. It was contrary to the spirit and will of Christ and was, in fact, rebuked by him. But it was a strong act nevertheless, done out of a passionate (though misguided) concern for his master.

Finally, to go back even farther into the history of Peter's experience, we recall that on an earlier occasion *it was Peter who confessed Jesus* as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," when the other disciples were silent (Matt. 16:16; cf. John 6:68). This is no miserable specimen

chosen from among the ranks of Christ's worst followers. This is the best. Yet it is precisely this one who falls, not only dreadfully but speedily and with such slight provocation.

It was a maid who asked the first question. Moreover, she even begins her remarks with a negative (this is quite apparent in the Greek), as if to say, "Surely you are not one of his disciples, are you?" It was not a formal accusation. It was not even a very strenuous challenge. Yet Peter, overcome by the uncertainty and terror of the moment, replies, "I am not" (v. 17). From this point on, having denied his Lord once, he finds it easy to do so again, once to an unspecified group (v. 25) and a third time to the kinsman of the man whose ear he had cut off (vv. 26-27).

Steps of His Fall

Why did Peter fall? If Peter was as strong as we say and yet fell, it is important to know the steps of his fall so that we may avoid them. There are several.

First, Peter was *overconfident.* Earlier Jesus had warned his disciples that they were going to abandon him. But Peter said in effect, "Lord, I do not know about these others; as I look around at these other disciples, I sense that they are not the kind of people that I, Peter, would have chosen. It may very well be that they will deny you—but not I, not Peter." Jesus reiterated his warning. But Peter replied, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you" (Mark 14:31). We can hardly miss the conclusion that if we indulge ourselves in such overconfidence, if we think that we are invulnerable because we are strong, have certain obvious talents, are wise or can analyze the tendencies and dangers of our culture, then we are well on our way to falling.
Jesus has said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Nothing means *nothing!* Whenever we forget that, we are in trouble.

Second, Peter *failed to pray.* The Lord did not fail to pray. This seems a strange reversal. If we were to pick someone who, in our opinion, did

not need to pray, it would obviously be the Lord. If we were to pick someone who needed prayer, it would be Peter. Yet Peter is sleeping in the
Garden while the Lord is pouring out his soul before his heavenly Father. Peter had been warned. He had been admonished to watch and pray. Unfortunately, the church and many Christians are asleep today with no less warning. Paul said, "Pray continually" (1 Thess. 5:17). Yet it is often the case that we do not pray because we do not think it necessary.

Third, Peter *"followed at a distance"* (Luke 22:54). A moment ago we pointed out that Peter had at least followed when the others had apparently fled. That is true. But although Peter followed, he followed at a great distance; and that was not entirely commendable.

It is true of many in our time, as can be easily observed. Many legitimately, truly, honestly do follow Jesus. But they follow at a distance, because they do not want to become too "fanatical" or "lose touch" with the world that surrounds them. Moreover, they think they are safe at a distance, though they are actually in greater danger. When Jesus calls a person to follow him, he calls him to follow in his footsteps, which means "right behind me." But these hold back, thinking that the closer they are to Jesus the greater their danger will be. Actually, although their exposure is greater, the danger is less. For Christ is the victor. He has guaranteed victory. The place to be really safe, though in the midst of battle, is next to him.

"With Them... with Him"

The fourth step in Peter's fall is the step emphasized by John. It is found in the contrast between a phrase in verse 18 and a phrase in verse 26. In verse 18, it says of Peter as he stood around the fire, "Peter also was standing *with them."* Then in verse 26, after several had begun to challenge him, the kinsman of the man whose ear Peter had cut off asked, "Didn't I see you *with him?"* Peter, who had been with him (that

is, with Jesus), is now in the courtyard of the high priest with those who are Christ's enemies.

Is this true of us, that we are more with those of the culture in which we live than with Jesus? This does not mean that we are to go out of this world. We are not called to detach ourselves to some kind of spiritual ghetto. We are to be in the world. But—this is the point—we are not to be of it. We are to be with Christ in the midst of the culture, not with them whose culture it is.

I would like to ask this question of you, the question that was asked of Peter: "Didn't I see you with him?" I would like to ask it forcefully. Have you been with Jesus? Have you been with him in fellowship? Have you been with him in Bible study? Have you been with him in prayer? If your answer is yes, as I trust it will be, I then want to follow up that question in this way. First, if you have been with him, then *you have been seen with him.* You may think that you have not been seen. You may think that you are a secret believer. You may think that your family is so non-Christian that you cannot possibly let your family know what has happened, so you do not confess Christ openly. But if you are really Christ's, the difference will be seen in you so clearly that whether you want to or not you will have been observed to have been with Jesus. Your immediate family will notice it right away. Those with whom you work will notice it shortly. If you come to fellowship with other Christians in a good church, as you should, you will be noticed by many additional people as well.

Next I want to ask: If you really have been with him and have been seen with him, is it not true that *certain things will be expected of you* because you have been with him? Again, you may not want those things to be expected of you. You may have noticed that there is even a sense in which those who are unsaved demand too much of us who profess Christ. They demand something approaching perfection, and we are not perfect. If we get the notion that we are perfect, we are in trouble indeed. Yet there is a sense in which the world is right to expect certain

things, and our Christian brothers and sisters are right to expect them also.

For example, they should expect certain things in regard to our profession. We say we are Christ's, that he is our Savior and Lord. We are seen in his company. Therefore, we should profess what he professes. If we do not profess that, if we do not receive his teaching personally, then he is not our Lord, no matter what we may say. If we follow him, his doctrine should be our doctrine.

Again, if we follow Jesus, his priorities should be our priorities, his values should be our values. This means that we are not at liberty to borrow our culture from the world. We are not at liberty to assume the world's values and adopt the world's theology. Our theology and values must be his.

Again, the marks of the church that Jesus talked about in the seventeenth chapter of John, just one chapter before this, should characterize us as well. We should be filled with joy. We should be characterized by holiness. We must stand with him in his truth. We should be engaged in the mission to which he commissions us. There should be an observable unity among Christian people. All we do should be characterized by love. If we have been with Christ, if (like Peter) we have been associated with him in his ministry, then the world has a right to expect certain patterns of behavior and character from us.

Commitment and Cleansing

If you have been with Christ, there is a call in this text to commitment. So much of our discipleship today is halfhearted. We say we will follow Jesus, but we follow afar off, as Peter did. This is not the kind of discipleship that Jesus lays before us.

Spurgeon once had an opportunity to talk to a girl who was halfhearted. She was trying to live in the world and at the same time follow Christ. He said to her, "There are three things you can do, and those three things I will set before you by an illustration. When you get outside the Tabernacle, there will be a tramcar. Now, go up to the car, and put one

foot on the car, and keep the other foot on the ground, and if you do not come down with a smash I am very much mistaken. Yet many people try to keep in with the world and keep in with Christ, and they will never do it; but will make a terrible fall of it before long. Now, the second thing that you can do is, that you can keep standing in the world in the mud, and not get into the car at all. You can stop there, and let the tramcar go by: that is all fair and straight. If you want to live in the world, and be of the world, well, live in the world, and take what pleasure it can give you, and reap the fruit of it at last. But there is a third thing you can do, namely, get right off the road into the car, and let the car take you right away where it is going. Now, it is this third thing that I commend to you. Get right into Christ, and let the Lord Jesus, by the power of his Holy Spirit, carry you right away from the unclean place where you now stand, bearing you in safety along the tramlines of holiness till he brings you to the terminus of glory at his own right hand."

You may be saying, as some do, "I understand clearly what you are teaching. I know this is the kind of discipleship Christ calls for. But in my case it is too late. I am like Peter. I know I should have followed Christ wholeheartedly. I know I should have been near to him. But I have followed at a distance. I have denied him. I have compromised my faith hundreds of times and more. I can never be Christ's disciple."

If you are thinking along these lines, let me assure you that it is not too late. With God it is never too late. It is true that sin brings consequences and that some sins bring consequences so terrible that they remain with us for life. But in this matter of discipleship God always begins with you where you are right now. You may have denied Jesus once. You may have denied him a hundred times. It makes no difference. Jesus comes to you now with the call of discipleship. He says, "Follow me now." Then he sets a new way before you.

We have an illustration of this in the case of Peter. On the one hand, we have Peter described in the eighteenth chapter of John, warming himself by the fire of Christ's enemies. He is cold, lonely, left out. He gets such warmth as he can from those who are determined to do away with his

Master. It is a sad picture. Yet a little later, in the twenty-first chapter, there is another Peter and another fire. This fire is kindled by the Lord, the fire on which he prepared breakfast for the disciples. And the same Lord whom Peter had denied in chapter 18 appears in chapter 21 to recommission him to service.

May I carry this concept a step further? This fire reminds us of that described by Isaiah in Isaiah 6, after he had seen the Lord in his glory. He had seen Christ in his holiness, and he had been impressed with his own sin. He said, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (v. 5). But what happened? God sent an angel with a coal from off this altar to purge away the sin, and after that, when Isaiah heard the question, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"—Isaiah, the man who was conscious of his sin, said, "Here am I. Send me" (v. 8). Peter heard that question and responded in the same way, for when Jesus came to him after his resurrection and asked, "Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" Peter answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you" (John 21:15). The Lord said, "Feed my lambs."

So it has been with all who have ever served the Lord Jesus Christ faithfully. Those who serve— who are really used in God's service, who are a blessing to other people, who take the gospel of eternal life to those who need to hear it, who keep on in the midst of difficulty—these are not those who have never denied Christ. They have! They have denied him many times and in many ways. But they have found the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ even in the midst of their denials and have been purged from their sin. Then with a sense of their own weakness, but an even greater awareness of Christ's strength, they have gone on to live for him.

Chapter 231.
The Roman Trial

John 18:28-32

The trial of Jesus of Nazareth, as a result of which he was crucified, is in reality two separate trials, one Jewish and one Roman. The trials are separate as far as the jurisdictions, charges, and judges are concerned. The only common elements are the accusers and the accused. The reason for the two trials is that the Jewish court had lost the power to administer the death penalty by the first Christian century; thus, since the leaders of Israel were determined to have Christ executed, they were forced to secure a Roman verdict along with their own.

This makes for a unique and fascinating situation, for it means that in this one instance a man was tried, on the one hand, by a court of heaven seeking to apply the revealed law of God and, on the other hand, by a court of man seeking to apply what is generally thought to be the most highly developed form of law we know.

Jewish law was probably the most humane system of law ever devised. So great was Jewish respect for human life, that it was practically impossible to execute a person under the jurisdiction of a Hebrew court. Roman law was excellent as measured by the comprehensiveness of its coverage, systematization of formal statutes, elaboration of court procedures, and the affixing of penalties. It has been said of the ancient world that Judea gave religion, Greece gave letters, and Rome gave law. The laws of Rome have been passed on to the Western world as the basis of its judicial systems. The Germans were never defeated by the legions of Rome and, in fact, were eventually the people who overthrew the declining Roman Empire. Yet they unquestioningly adopted the Roman laws and edicts. Even today the *Corpus Juris Civilis* of Justinian is carefully studied in the great universities of the world.

Walter Chandler summarizes the issue thus: 'Jesus was arraigned in one day, in one city, before the sovereign courts of the universe; before the Sanhedrin, the supreme tribunal of a divinely commissioned race; before the court of the Roman Empire that determined the legal and political rights of men throughout the known world. The Nazarene stood charged with blasphemy and with treason against the enthroned monarchs represented by these courts; blasphemy against Jehovah who, from the lightning-lit summit of Sinai, proclaimed his laws to mankind;

treason against Caesar, enthroned and uttering his will to the world amidst the pomp and splendor of Rome. History records no other instance of a trial conducted before the courts of both Heaven and earth; the court of God and the court of man; under the law of Israel and the law of Rome; before Caiaphas and Pilate, as the representatives of these courts and administrators of these laws."

Considering the nature of Roman law, with its careful attention to procedure, we might think that the trial before Pilate would be much easier to understand than the trial before the Jewish
Sanhedrin. Yet this is not the case. On the contrary, although the Hebrew trial has its puzzling elements (we might, for example, ask how Jesus could possibly be rejected by the leaders of his own people, those who should have known who he was on the basis of the Old Testament prophecies), the rejection is nevertheless understandable. He was rejected because he was hated, and he was hated because he had revealed the leaders' sin. None of this makes sense where the trial before Pilate is concerned. Pilate did not hate Jesus. If anything, he seems to have respected him. He even acquitted him, pronouncing him innocent on three separate occasions. Yet he eventually turned Jesus over to be crucified.

Frank Morison has rightly said, "We do not get rid of the mystery of Christ when we bring Him to the Roman bar; we increase it tenfold."

The Roman Procurator

Perhaps the greatest mystery in the case of the Roman trial is the marked contrast between what we know of Pilate's character (as revealed in the secular sources) and his conduct at the trial of Jesus (as revealed in the Gospel narratives).

Pilate was not a noble character. In fact, if it were not for his influential connections through marriage, he would never have come even to the relatively insignificant post he held as procurator of Judea. He came from Spain, being a native of Seville. He had joined the legions of Germanicus in the wars on the Rhine. After peace had been secured, he

went to Rome to make his fortune. There he met and married Claudia Proculla, the youngest daughter of Julia who was the daughter of the emperor Augustus. From the perspective of Pilate's future this was a wise move. Claudia had connections with the highest levels of Roman government. But morally it was a disgrace; for Julia, who thereby became Pilate's mother-in-law, was a woman of such depraved and coarse habits that even in decadent Rome she was notorious. Augustus, her father, avoided her presence and eventually banished her. It is reported that afterward, whenever someone would mention the name of his daughter to him, Augustus would exclaim, "Would I were wifeless or had childless died!" Unlike Pilate, a man of nobler instincts would not have married into such a family.

Nevertheless, through his new connections Pilate applied for and was awarded the procuratorship of Judea, which post he assumed in A.D. 26. He was the sixth procurator. Those before him were: Sabinus, Caponius, Ambivus, Rufus, and Gratus.

These earlier rulers had exercised great care in their respect for the religious prejudices of the Jews and had governed the people wisely. In particular, they had carefully avoided exhibiting any emblems, flags, or standards that, because they bore the images of the emperor, were offensive to the Jewish population. Even Vitellius, the legate of Syria, when he was marching against the Arabian king Aretas, ordered his troups to march around Jewish territory rather than carry their battle standards through it. Yet Pilate, in obstinate folly and in defiance of the established policy of the earlier procurators, provoked a confrontation on this and other matters.

Three incidents stand out. First, when Pilate arrived in Judea, he sent soldiers to Jerusalem by night carrying ensigns blazoned with the images of Tiberius. That he did this by night indicates his awareness that there might be trouble, but that he did it at all indicates his insensitivity to the feelings of those whose land he was to govern. Nor did subsequent developments prove him wiser. When their city was thus defiled, great numbers of the Jews of Jerusalem flocked down to Caesarea, where Pilate was staying, to demand that the standards be

removed. Pilate refused, and the stalemate went on for five days. At last the procurator grew angry, summoned the people to the stadium, surrounded them with soldiers and gave notice that they would be killed if they did not immediately and quietly disperse. To his surprise they threw themselves to the ground, bared their necks, and declared that they would rather die than see their holy city contaminated. When he saw that he could get his way only by wholesale slaughter Pilate reluctantly backed off and had the ensigns lowered.

Pilate's actions were not typical of Roman administrators. In fact, thanks to Josephus, we have a nearly parallel story with an entirely different result. It involved a Roman officer named Petronius. Petronius had a much greater incentive to enforce his will than Pilate had to enforce his, for he had been specifically commanded by the emperor to place the imperial image in the Jewish temple. But Petronius sensed the problem, tried negotiations, and when those failed bravely reported his decision not to enforce the decree and the reasons for his decision to Caius. Petronius was an example of Roman courage and diplomacy at their best. Pilate's conduct reveals the opposite characteristics.

A second incident reveals the same flaws in Pilate's character. He had determined to build an aqueduct to bring water from the Pools of Solomon into Jerusalem. In itself this was commendable and would have been favored by the citizens of the city. But Pilate startled and enraged them by the foolish act of raiding the sacred "Corban" treasury in order to fund the work. The Jews considered this money set aside to God to be used only in his work. To plunder it was sacrilege. Yet Pilate went ahead. Later, when he learned that the people would be sending citizens to beg for the restoration of the temple monies, he sent soldiers into the crowd disguised as common people who, on a prearranged signal, drew hidden clubs and daggers and attacked the demonstrators. In this episode Pilate had his way, but he intensified the hatred of the people of Roman rule.

Josephus and Philo also tell of a third episode in which Pilate, despite his previous experiences, insisted that votive shields dedicated to Tiberius be placed in the palace of Herod. Again the Jews objected, and

Pilate refused to have the shields removed. At this point a petition signed by the leading men of the nation, including the names of four of the sons of Herod, was sent to the emperor, asking for the removal of the offensive objects. Significantly, Tiberius granted the request, and the shields were taken out of Herod's palace and hung in the temple of Augustus at Caesarea instead.

We might add to these examples an incident recorded by Luke, in which the "blood" of certain
Galileans was "mixed with their sacrifices" (Luke 13:1). We know nothing about this incident. But the reference suggests that Pilate attacked these people in the moment of their worship. If so, it is another example of his cruel and reckless dealings with the Jews.

In each of these incidents and from each of the writers through whom we learn of them we receive an amazingly consistent picture. It is a picture of one who obviously did not have the sensitivity or strength of character to rule well. He was stubborn, proud, corrupt, violent, and cruel.

The Gospel Picture

Yet the mystery comes in at this point, for as soon as we turn to the Gospel accounts, we find a portrait not of one who is cruel and insensitive but rather of one who seems to be sensitive to the cause of justice through his apparent desire to have Jesus of Nazareth acquitted. The Gospel writers would have no cause to enhance Pilate's character. He was the one who actually carried out the crucifixion of their Lord. We may assume, therefore, that the accounts of his actions that they give are correct. But this does not seem to agree with what we know of Pilate elsewhere. The true Pilate is arrogant, overbearing, and unyielding. This Pilate is attempting every stratagem and compromise he knows to have Jesus acquitted.

First, he reopens the case to the obvious surprise and consternation of the Jewish leaders. This is the essential point of the verses with which John begins his account of the trial. The Jewish leaders must have

arranged with Pilate to have a hasty morning confirmation of the verdict that they were to reach the night before. But instead of the quick ruling they expected, Pilate began a formal hearing. What had happened to Pilate in the preceding eight or nine hours? Why had he changed his mind?

As the trial goes on we see Pilate's concern demonstrated in other ways. Three times over he declares that Christ is innocent (John 18:38; 19:4, 6). Again, when the leaders are adamant in opposition to his verdict, he tries a series of subterfuges. He sends Christ to Herod, hoping that Herod will take the matter out of his hands (Luke 23:6-12). He offers a choice between Jesus or Barabbas, wishing that Jesus might be set free (Matt. 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; John 18:39-40). Finally, he scourges Jesus, thinking that the sight of the bleeding, broken man might move his accusers to pity (John 19:1-5).

Behind Every Man

What accounts for this unnatural change in Pilate's character? Why is he trying to release the Lord? There have been three possible explanations: the first of which is clearly not right (though we should consider it), the second of which probably has some truth (but only some), the third of which alone seems to be the truly adequate reason.

The first explanation is that Pilate was more noble than the secular historians give him credit for being. This is an obvious possibility. But it is clearly not right; for it is the secular historians and not the biblical writers who have the best motivations for placing the Roman ruler in a good light. They have no reason to slander him. Hence, we must believe that he really was the kind of man they picture. Conversely, the biblical writers have no reason to place him in a good light at all. If they do, it is clearly because (on this occasion at least and for whatever reason) he acted precisely as they portray him.

The second explanation probably contains some truth. It is that Pilate was impressed by the person of Jesus. We can imagine this to be true because of what we believe concerning the presence and overriding

dignity of Christ. But we have to admit that there is very little in the narratives to suggest this as Pilate's real motivation. We sense that Pilate may have been impressed, but if he had put it into words he would probably have dismissed Christ as "a harmless religious fanatic" and little more. Certainly this was no overriding reason to spare him.

The third explanation, which I suspect is the real one, is outlined in detail by Frank Morison, in the work referred to already. He reminds us that on the morning of the trial Pilate, according to Matthew's account, received an urgent warning from his wife, Claudia, who was in the city with him over this particular weekend, saying that he should have nothing to do with Jesus and giving as her reason that she had dreamt about him. Matthew reports this: "When Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him" (27:19). To those who live in the twentieth century this may seem almost inconsequential. But the Romans were particularly superstitious where dreams were concerned and seldom undertook any grand enterprise without some inquiry as to what the gods or fate deemed favorable. To Pilate his wife's warning would therefore have been quite serious, and he might well have determined to extricate himself at whatever cost from his earlier agreement to consent to Jesus' death.

Moreover, this generally overlooked factor in the events of the Roman trial makes sense of several other elements, as Morison indicates. He suggests:

1. That Pilate and Claudia were probably spending the night together on the evening Jesus was arrested.
2. That Claudia would therefore have known of the visit of Caiaphas (or whoever made up the Jewish delegation) and would have learned of its purpose, either through being present or through asking Pilate about it afterward.

3. That she went to bed with thoughts of Jesus in her mind and then, quite understandably, dreamed of him with forebodings.

4. That she awoke in the morning to find that Pilate had already risen and left the palace and therefore knew at once the business on which he was embarked and her own need for haste.

5. That she quickly wrote the message Matthew records and forwarded it to her husband, saying that he was not to condemn "that *righteous* man."

Morison concludes, "It was she who stiffened the Roman instinct for justice in Pilate, at a moment when he was tempted, from personal considerations, to humor the prejudices of the Jewish camarilla, and commit Jesus on their recommendation alone. It was she who was the author of that resplendent phase when the tyrant was seen for a few hours in the guise of a patient administrator anxious to weigh the truth to the last ounce.... While the stimulus lasted his handling of this difficult and perplexing case was well-nigh perfect. No more just hearing than this could any man have asked or obtained in any court of that far-off day. The restraining influence of one who clearly believed that Jesus was innocent is obviously upon it. It was only as the stimulus faded against the grinding and growing opposition of the Jewish party that the threat of Caesar's intervention became paramount, and he ended as he intended to begin, by delivering the Prisoner into their hands."

Life's Crises

With that we confront the second great mystery of the Roman trial. The first is that Pilate acted out of character in his obvious desire to have Christ acquitted. We have analyzed that and studied the reason. The second mystery is that, in spite of this great desire and in spite of his power to see that his will was carried out, in the end Pilate consented to Christ's execution.

One lesson in this is the impossibility of a neutral stance where Christ is concerned. Pilate clearly wanted to release him. But he was not a believer in Christ. He was not a follower of Christ. He merely wanted to be innocent of Christ's condemnation; and, of course, he failed miserably. He could not be neutral, and neither can we be. We must either be for the Lord Jesus Christ or against him. Either we are for him, in which case he will strengthen us and enable us to live for him even in the midst of great trials. Or we are against him, no matter how humane, noble, or understanding we may consider ourselves to be.

The second lesson concerns the need to be prepared for life's crises. When Pilate arose that morning, he certainly did not expect to be confronted by the greatest decision of his career. That morning, all he thought he was going to do was consent to a routine condemnation that was basically not much of his affair. Yet suddenly the crisis was on him. Jesus was there, and Jesus was either innocent or guilty. What was Pilate to do? How would he act? We know the outcome. He failed. It would be wise to conclude, therefore, on the basis of his experience as well as our own, that we should never count on either a sense of nobility (which Pilate undoubtedly thought to be true in his case), insight (which is always expected of judges), or the warning of friends (as was the case in the urgent communication from his wife) to be adequate to lead us to do the right thing in a crisis situation.

What will? The only thing that is adequate is the life of the Lord Jesus Christ within and a close relationship with him out of which he can speak to us and lead us to do right in spite of our natural inclinations.

Chapter 232.
Jesus before Pilate

John 18:33-38

The previous study dealt with two puzzling aspects of the Roman trial: one, the contrast between what we know from secular sources regarding

Pilate's character—insensitive, impetuous, 1426 rude—and the way the four Gospels indicate he actually conducted the trial; the second, that Pilate pronounced Christ innocent and yet condemned him to be crucified. These elements make a study of the Roman trial quite difficult and suggest levels of mystery that are possibly unfathomable.

There is one aspect of the Roman trial that is not the least bit mysterious, however. It is the tendency of human nature meticulously to go through all the external forms required by a situation while at the same time denying the very reality the forms stand for. There are two examples of this in the second segment of Christ's trial. On the one hand, there is the example of the Jewish rulers who, we are told, "to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover" (John 18:28). Here were men engaged in a most vile act, the judicial murder of Jesus; yet they were concerned about being ceremonially defiled. They had convicted an innocent man of crimes worthy of death, breaking scores of their own laws in the process. They were about to seek a parallel conviction from Pilate by illegally and unconscionably changing the nature of the accusation made against their prisoner. Yet they were concerned about a ritual purification.

The other example of this human tendency is Pilate, who made a great show of justice while actually allowing mob action to force his acquiescence in the death of a man whom he knew was innocent.

The Formal Indictment

Some students of the Roman trial of Jesus have insisted that the real trial was before the Jewish Sanhedrin and that this was merely an informal hearing. But their argument overlooks the actual stages of the trial as they are recorded for us by the New Testament authors. A Roman trial had four essential elements: the indictment, the examination, the defense, and the verdict. Each of these is present in Christ's trial. The official nature of the proceedings is indicated by Pilate's opening words: "What charges are you bringing against this man?" (v. 29). As Chandler observes, 'This question is very keenly

indicative of the presence of the judge and of the beginning of a solemn judicial proceeding. Every word rings with Roman authority and strongly suggests administrative action."

Pilate's question seems to have caught the Jewish leaders by surprise, however. For instead of replying with a formal indictment, as they should have been prepared to do, they attempted to evade the question by answering: "If he were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you" (v. 30).

At the very least, the reply of the leaders suggests that the priests and scribes regarded their own trial as sufficient and were coming to Pilate merely to secure a formal signature to effect the execution. They were saying, "You should accept the judgment that he is worthy of death merely because we say so." On the other hand, there may be more to it than this, as was argued in our earlier treatment of the Jewish trial. As we saw in that study, we can hardly suppose that the Jewish Sanhedrin launched into the trial of Jesus at this relatively late hour in Passover week without some understanding with Pilate that he would hear the case and concur in their verdict early on this particular morning. It is clear that the Jews expected a perfunctory endorsement of the verdict already arrived at by their own court. When Pilate surprised them by apparently intending to open the case anew and conduct a formal hearing, they were temporarily caught off guard and replied with this evasion.

Pilate said that if they were unwilling to make a formal accusation, they obviously did not need him and therefore should prosecute the case according to their own laws and inflict whatever penalties they were legally entitled to impose. It is possible that at this point Pilate did not understand that the Jews were seeking the death penalty in Jesus' case, but it is far more likely that he understood this all too well and was speaking as he did merely to remind the priests that they were under the rule of Rome and would have to conform to Rome's rules if they wished to have Christ executed. In a later incident involving the apostle Paul, the same principle was stated: "It is not the Roman custom to hand over

any man before he has faced his accusers and has had an opportunity to defend himself against their charges" (Acts 25:16).

The unanticipated stubbornness of Pilate clearly thwarted the Jews in their designs. But they were resourceful and, therefore, produced an accusation on the spur of the moment. John does not record it; he passes instead to the heart of the accusation and Pilate's examination of Jesus on this point. But Luke gives the accusation in full. It has three parts. "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be the Christ" (Luke 23:2).

This is not the crime of which Jesus had been convicted in their own court. Chandler writes, "In the passage from the Sanhedrin to the Praetorium, the indictment had completely changed. Jesus had not been condemned on any of the charges recorded in this sentence of St. Luke. He had been convicted on the charge of blasphemy. But before Pilate he is now charged with high treason.... Why? Because blasphemy was not an offense against Roman law, and Roman judges would generally assume cognizance of no such charges.

"The Jews understood perfectly well at the trial before Pilate the principle of Roman procedure so admirably expressed a few years later by Gallio, proconsul of Achaia, and brother of Seneca: 'If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: but if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters.' This attitude of Roman governors toward offenses of a religious nature perfectly explains the Jewish change of front in the matter of the accusation against Jesus. They merely wanted to get themselves into a Roman court on charges that a Roman judge would consent to try. In the threefold accusation recorded by the third Evangelist, they fully accomplished this result."

The first charge was that Christ was "perverting the nation." This was indefinite. Had Pilate taken it seriously, it would have had to have been supported by specific examples of sedition. Still, it was a real offense. It was, in fact, the precise charge that the Jewish court had tried to prove

against Jesus in reference to his claim to be able to tear down the temple and rebuild it in three days. The Jews had been unable to prove this in their court because of the contradictory testimony of their witnesses.

The second charge was also serious. In fact, it was more serious than the first in that it was a specific treasonable act under Roman law governing a captive state. The only problem with this charge is that it was clearly false. On an earlier occasion the nation's leaders had attempted to trap Jesus on this very issue, but he had acquitted himself admirably. They had come to him with a trick question, asking, "What is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" (Matt. 22:17). They reasoned that if he said yes, they could denounce him to the people, saying, "What kind of Messiah is this who counsels abject subservience to Rome?" On the other hand, if he replied no, they could denounce him to Rome, saying "You have an insurrectionist on your hands." But what did Christ answer? He asked for a coin and demanded of his questioners, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" (v. 20). When they replied, "Caesar's," he gave that ruling that has become the classical biblical statement of the separation of church and state, involving the proper responsibilities of and to each. He said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (v. 21). In this charge the leaders were therefore guilty of the most flagrant and malicious of lies.

The third charge was the greatest and most serious of the three, that Jesus had claimed to be "Christ, a king." It was serious because it was true. It was also serious because it was the claim about which Rome was most sensitive and against which she was most on her guard. When Pilate heard this charge he gathered his robes about him, motioned for Jesus to follow him, made his way back into the palace (which John alone records) and began the examination, the second part of every Roman trial. Not content with receiving the formal accusation alone, Pilate now sought to determine whether the charges preferred against Jesus were true.

The Examination

Each of the Gospel writers records the question with which Pilate began his interrogation. It is simply, "Are you the King of the Jews?" (Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; John 18:33). With this question Pilate, it would appear, impatiently brushed aside the two lesser charges as unworthy of serious consideration and proceeded at once to examine Jesus on that charge which, if true, would unmistakably brand him Caesar's enemy.

John records Christ's full reply. As we read it, it seems like an evasion —"Is that your own idea or did others talk to you about me?" (v. 34)— but actually Jesus' reply is much to the point. For having heard the charge first from the lips of the Jews and now from Pilate himself, Jesus wishes to know first of all in what sense the question is being put to him. What was the nature of the charge? If the question were being asked from a Roman point of view, one answer would be given; for Christ was not a king from Rome's perspective. On the other hand, if the question were being asked from a Jewish perspective, quite another answer would be given; for Jesus was the Jews' Messiah.

Pilate's reply, while abrupt, is nevertheless also directly to the point at this stage in the examination. He asks, "Am I a Jew? It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" (v. 35). This means, "I am no Jew. I ask my question as a Roman administrator and, as such, purely religious questions have no interest for me. What I want to know is: What have you done that might affect the sovereignty of Caesar?"

The Defense

At this point, although the interrogation continues, Jesus begins his defense by introducing what in modern law would be called a plea of confession and avoidance. This is a plea which admits, either in words or in effect, the truth of the accusation but which nevertheless introduces some new matter to avoid the guilt which normally would follow. For example, we may imagine a case in which a man is on trial for murder. The judge asks, "Did you shoot and kill John Smith on the date in question?" The defendant might answer, "Yes, I did, Your

Honor; but you should know that I discovered him in my dining room near an open window trying to steal my silver chest and that when I discovered him he came at me with a knife. My plea is justified homicide and selfdefense." Here the defendant admits to the killing but pleads extenuating circumstances. In the same way, the Lord now admits to the charge of having claimed to be a king but describes his kingship in such a way that it is seen to be no threat to the legitimate claims of Caesar.

Jesus first explains the nature of his kingdom negatively: "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place" (v. 36).

We do not know whether Pilate understood what Jesus was saying in this reply, but one phrase immediately caught his attention, the phrase "my kingdom." Jesus seemed to be saying that this was not an earthly kingdom, but Pilate could take no chances on this crucial issue. He therefore picked up on this phrase and (probably) advanced on Christ threateningly to demand sternly, "You are a king, then!" (v. 37).

This time Jesus replies to the question with a positive affirmation: "You are right in saying that I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me" (v. 37).

Jesus' defense has two parts. One is a negative definition of his kingdom. It is "not of this world." The proof is that his disciples did not fight to prevent his arrest by the Jewish authorities. The other is a positive definition of the kingdom. It is of "the truth." That is, it is a kingdom ruling over people's minds and aspirations. Chandler writes, "His was not an empire of matter, but a realm of truth. His kingdom differed widely from that of Caesar. Caesar's empire was over the bodies of men; Christ's over their souls. The strength of Caesar's kingdom was in citadels, armies, navies, the towering Alps, the all-engirding seas. The strength of the kingdom of Christ was and is and will ever be in sentiments, principles, ideas, and the saving power of a divine word."

Pilate could not fully appreciate this instruction. 'Truth?" he asked. "What is truth?" Then he turned away, convinced at last that whatever Jesus' peculiar ideas, he was certainly no worse than any other religious fanatic and was, at least from Rome's point of view, perfectly innocent of any capital offenses.

The Verdict

The last phase of the Roman trial followed immediately upon Pilate's examination of Jesus and Jesus' defense. John tells us that, having concluded this examination, "he went out again to the Jews, and said, 'I find no basis for a charge against him'" (v. 38). *Absolvo! Nonfecisse videtur*! Standing alone these phrases indicate the close of the trial and mark it as being an official court proceeding.

Pilate had tried and acquitted Jesus. Why then did he not release him or, if need be, place him in protective custody as a later Roman ruler did with the apostle Paul when his life was threatened (Acts 21:31-33; 23:12-24)? This is the question that the human race has asked of Pontius Pilate for nearly two thousand years. Pilate was guilty of nothing at all up to this point. In fact, he had conducted the trial with precision, wisdom, and dispatch. He had reached the right verdict. But now, in spite of his calling as a Roman governor and judge, the high example of many thousands of Roman administrators before him, and the power of the legions in Palestine, he failed to do the right thing by immediately setting Christ free. The mood of the crowd forestalled him. Then he settled down into a series of irregular and illegal proceedings that eventually ended in the prisoner's execution. Pilate was a coward. This is the only proper analysis of his character and the ultimate explanation of why he failed to do right in this situation.

What does this mean? It means that in the true, eternal issues of the case it is Pilate who was judged by the Lord and found wanting. I have titled this chapter 'Jesus before Pilate," but we must never forget that in another and far more important sense it is also "Pilate before Jesus." In the former Jesus was tried and found innocent. Rightly so. In the latter Pilate was tried and found guilty.

So are all who stand before Christ. He is the only perfect person who ever lived. His standard for us is perfection. We all fall short, each one. For "there is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Rom. 3:10-12). We stand condemned. But it is for such condemned men and women that Christ died. He died to bear the punishment for their sin and thereby free them from God's righteous judgment and curse.

Has he done that for you? He has if you are a subject of his kingdom, which you have entered (if you have entered it) by a believing response to his truth and person. That response entails the belief that Jesus is who he says he is (the Son of God) and did what he said he would do (die for your sin), coupled with a personal commitment to follow him as your Savior and Lord.

Chapter 233.
Christ's Kingdom Not of This World

John 18:36-37

In the first of his two great letters to Timothy, the apostle Paul tells us that Jesus Christ "while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession" (1 Tim. 6:13). That good confession is not found in the synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, or Luke—for they contain only a fiveword response from Jesus. When Jesus was asked if he were the king of the Jews, they report him as answering, "It is as you say" (Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3), after which he said nothing. It is only in John that the good confession of Jesus before Pilate is reported to us fully.

We can be glad that John recorded it. For one thing, it teaches us what a "good confession" is. This confession is good as to the manner in which it is given. It was not rude or brusque or condescending or veiled in

mysteries, as our confessions often are. It was simple, kind, direct, and helpful. Though Christ was soon to be condemned by Pilate, he did not despise him but rather treated him with the respect due him because of his office. Again, the confession of our Lord was good as to its matter, for here, before one who was rightly concerned with earthly sovereignty, Christ spoke of divine versus human affairs and of God's sovereignty. This teaches us how we should speak of spiritual things and what we should say.

A second reason why we should be glad that John has included these words is that they contain a definition of the nature of Christ's kingdom in the very words of Jesus and at a most important moment.

Those who have studied the meaning of the kingdom of God in the Old and New Testaments know that this is a very complex subject, the reason being that the phrase is used in so many different ways. Sometimes it seems to refer in an abstract way to the reign or rule of God. At other times it refers to a coming future rule of Christ or God upon earth. In one key text (Luke 17:21, and parallels) the kingdom of God is said to be "among" or "in the midst" of this world, presumably in the person of Christ and his disciples. In a fourth series of passages the kingdom is something into which men and women enter. This is confusing, and it is compounded by the fact that, according to one writer at least, "Jesus nowhere defined what he meant by the phrase."

Well, it may be true that Jesus nowhere gives a careful theological definition of "the kingdom of God." There are not many terms he did do this with. But still these verses in John's Gospel may be brought forward as something very closely approaching it.

Christ, a King

The jumping-off point for Christ's definition of his kingdom is with the confession that he is indeed a king, whatever the appearances may be to the contrary. He did not look like a king. He was bound and beaten (Luke 22:63-65). He was to be beaten further still. Yet no king, seated

upon a throne at the pinnacle of world power, was more entitled to be called a king than he.

This fact is important, for what is true of the king is no less true of his kingdom. Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote of this more than a hundred years ago: "To this day, pure Christianity, in its outward appearances, is an equally unattractive object, and wears upon its surface few royal tokens. It is without form or comeliness, and when men see it, there is no beauty that they should desire it. True, there is a nominal Christianity which is accepted and approved of men, but the pure gospel is still despised and rejected. The real Christ of today, among men, is unknown and unrecognized as much as he was among his own nation eighteen hundred years ago.... Christ chanted in cathedrals, Christ personified in lordly prelates, Christ surrounded by such as are in kings' houses, *he* is well enough; but Christ honestly obeyed, followed, and worshiped in simplicity, without pomp or form, they will not allow to reign over them....

"We are satisfied that Christ is the king still where he was wont to be king, and that is not among the great ones of the earth, nor among the mighty and the learned, but amongst the base things of the world and the things which are not, which shall bring to nought the things that are, for these hath God from the beginning chosen to be his own."

A Spiritual Kingdom

Jesus says his kingdom is "not of this world." That says a great deal in itself and also by implication.

So far as the statement itself is concerned, it is a denial of the importance for Christ of those things that usually concern earthly monarchs. One concern is for geography. Kings rule a certain carefully defined territory. They protect that territory from others. When they fight, it is usually over this or other territory they wish to annex. But this is not Christ's concern. His kingdom is not of this world. Another concern of this world's rulers is with taxes. There has never been a kingdom without taxes. Taxes pay for the government, army, public works, and of course for the army of bureaucrats who collect the taxes and do a host of other things. But Christ's concern is not with taxes. His kingdom is not of this world. This world's princes are concerned with pomp and ceremony, prestige and privileges, acclaim. Not so Christ. It is of his kingdom as the hymn states:

> For not with swords' loud clashing,
> Nor roll of stirring drums— With deeds of love and mercy The heav'nly kingdom comes.

It is not only in a negative way that this definition of the kingdom of God speaks to us, however. It also speaks by implication. Christ has said that his kingdom is not of this world. But if that is true, from whence does it come? If his kingship is not of this world, it is either from hell or from heaven.

There is a kingdom which is the kingdom of hell. We do not mean by this that somewhere in the universe there is a geographic territory known as hell over which Satan presides, along the lines John Milton painted in *Paradise Lost.* There is a geographical hell, just as there is a geographical heaven. But Satan does not rule there. God rules hell. That is what makes hell so horrible. On the other hand, this does not mean that there is not a satanic, hellish kingdom. On the contrary, there is; and it is this we are speaking about. It is of this kingdom that Jesus

spoke when he referred to a kingdom being divided against itself and therefore being unable to stand (Mark 3:23-26). It is a "spiritual" kingdom founded on hate, pride, jealousy, anger, and cunning. It is the opposite of Christ's kingdom at every point. Is this Christ's source? Is this the source of his kingdom? We recall that the Pharisees thought so. Just before Christ's words about Satan's kingdom being divided against itself, they had said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons" (Mark 3:22).

This is one logical explanation of the authority and kingship Christ so obviously possessed and demonstrated. But is it an adequate explanation? Can it explain the nature of Christ and the qualities of his rule? If it cannot—and who can seriously maintain that Christ's character and ministry were demonic—then the source must be heaven and Christ must be the Son of God. Sheer logic forces any honest person to that position.

The same logic applies to Christ's person. After you have disposed of the one truly impossible explanation of who Jesus is (that he is "a good man"), there are only three things that can be said of him. One, he is God, as he claimed. Two, he was crazy, for he mistakenly claimed to be God when he was not. Or three, he was a deceiver, for he knew he was not God, yet claimed to be God in order to gain a following through such deception. There are no other possibilities. The one who would face Christ honestly must decide among them. Is the Christ who has been proclaimed by so many throughout so many thousands of years of human history insane, a deceiver, or God? He cannot be put off with any nonsense about being a good teacher or a good man.

This was the dilemma Jesus put before everyone when in the Roman hall of judgment he said, "My kingdom is not of this world." Rule out this world, where deception is all too universal and obvious, and there are only two possibilities left: hell or heaven. If you cannot say, "He is from hell," then he is from heaven, and his kingdom is too. And whatever your opinion of it may be or whatever your wishes may be,

you are his subject, and you are obliged to fall before him and confess him to be your Lord and your God.

When Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world," many utter a sigh of relief and say, "Well, thank God that Jesus' kingdom has nothing to do with us. It is a spiritual kingdom. Hallelujah! We can keep on as we have been and do as we please." Nothing is farther from the truth, for when we say that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, what we are really saying is that Christ's kingdom is of heaven and therefore has an even greater claim over us than do the earthly kingdoms we know so well. There is real sovereignty in an earthly kingdom. There is genuine authority which we may not flout. But over these is Christ, and we flout his kingship not merely at the peril of our fortune and lives but at the peril of our eternal souls.

Why risk such loss? Why not come to this king and confess his lordship? He has promised to rule in justice and with mercy, and he has assured us that his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

Two Kingdoms

There is a third area where Christ's words about his kingdom apply, and that is in their relationship to earthly powers, of which Pilate and the Roman Empire were examples. In modern American history there has been a tendency so to stress the legitimate principle of the separation of church and state that we have almost come to the point of saying that the church and state are not related to each other at all. This is wrong. Jesus deals with it not only in these verses, which speak of the nature of his kingdom, but also in the continuation of the discourse in chapter 19, in which the responsibility of Pilate over against the heavenly kingdom is stressed. In these later verses Pilate had begun to quiz Jesus again, and Jesus gave him no answer.

Pilate said, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"

Jesus replied, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin" (19:10-11).

This reply speaks directly to the church/state problem. While it is true that the church and state each have their legitimate spheres of authority, and while it is also true that the church and state should have separate organizations, neither possessing the right to appoint officers or authorities in the other—nevertheless, it is not true that they are totally unrelated, for in many areas they have the same concerns, and both are responsible to the same divine sovereign.

Some have said, for example, that the Christian community should be so separated from the secular sphere that Christians should not go into politics, that believers in general should not vote in elections, that we should withdraw from the culture as much as possible, live in distinct communities, have Christians as friends exclusively, work for Christian companies, and so on. But Jesus refutes this when he says that his kingdom is not "of the world. The key word is "of." If he had said "in," we would separate. But he said "of and therefore means that we are to be actively "in" the world though not "of it in terms of its values and goals. To turn to the other side, some have said that the state has nothing to do with the concerns of Christian people; that it is not in business to "regulate morality," for example. But again this is wrong; for when Jesus reminded Pilate that his authority came from God, he was also reminding him that it was to be exercised in accord with the character of that one whose authority it is.

When the state develops and enforces laws against homicide, what is that but the legislation of morality? It is the state's way of saying, "We agree that life is precious and that it is wrong to take it away. In this we support the sixth of God's Ten Commandments." Again, when the state makes laws against larceny and burglary, what is it doing but enforcing the eighth commandment? The same is true of its requirement of legal marriages, contracts, labor negotiations, and similar formalities in a hundred different areas. In each of these areas the state is dealing with

morality. Jesus emphasized in his words to Pilate that the state is responsible for this before God, just as the church is responsible.

This is the significance of Christ's mention of sin: "Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." Sin is a transgression of the law of God and is therefore punishable by God and will be punished by him. So Jesus was telling Pilate, "Your sin may not be as great as those who have hated me and turned me over to you. But their sin does not excuse your sin. You are still a sinner, and you will be judged for it."

Entering Christ's Kingdom

The final point Jesus made about his kingdom is that it is not entered into by secular means. The heavenly kingdom and the earthly kingdom overlap at some points, but not here. The same person may be in both; the emperor can also be a Christian. In some areas they have corresponding concerns. But they are nevertheless different kingdoms and are entered differently.

Jesus spelled this out in two ways. In one of the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount he indicated the manner in which we must enter, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). This does not mean, "Blessed are the poor-spirited" or "Blessed are failures." To be poor in spirit is the opposite of being rich in pride. It means to be humble. So Christ's first requirement for entering his kingdom is to humble yourself and take up the position of a suppliant before him. It is to pray with the publican, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

Second, in his words before Pilate Jesus shows that this also has a positive dimension in the area of our response to his truth. Humility is a prerequisite, but it does not produce salvation in and of itself. Rather, we must also respond to that truth that Jesus came to earth to communicate. It consists in this: that Jesus is God, that he died on our behalf, and that those who have nothing to present to God in terms of

their own merit nevertheless can come boldly to God on the merit of Jesus.

Chapter 234.
What Is Truth?

John 18:37-38

There are two ways to define something, and both are necessary. One way is by telling what the object in question is. The other way is by telling what it is not. Both are important because if you cannot say what it is not, then the object may very well be everything and consequently nothing. Some persons' definitions of God are like that; he is everything and therefore nothing at all. On the other hand, it is also necessary to say what the object is, because the negatives at best merely narrow down the possibilities.

This basic principle is important in the matter of the examination of Jesus by Pilate, for the crucial issue was the claim of the Lord to be a king and consequently to possess a kingdom. Was this kingship and kingdom to be thought of as in opposition to that of Caesar, whose interests Pilate was obliged to represent? Was it an earthly kingdom? Or was it something else, something that did not threaten Caesar's legitimate interests and that, therefore, neither he nor Pilate should fear? These were valid questions. So, in his conversation with Pilate, Jesus was careful to define the nature of his kingdom accurately. He defined it negatively by affirming that it is "not of this world." Now he defines it positively, showing that it is of "the truth" and that it was for the very purpose of bearing witness to the truth that he came into the world. In developing this he says, "For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me" (John 18:37).

Pilate's Question

The interesting thing about this definition of Jesus' kingdom is that Pilate's response was not in the nature of a further pursuit of the matter or even a recognition of the importance of what Jesus said. Rather, it was a cynical response based on what was to Pilate the seeming impossibility of ever knowing what truth is. "What is truth?" he said, and then walked out.

When Sir Francis Bacon came to write his famous essay "On Truth," he suggested that Pilate's famous words were facetious. Bacon began, "What is truth? said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer." Whatever these words were they were far from facetious, however. Pilate had just looked into the eyes of the Son of God and had heard him exclaim, "For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth." No one who has had that experience could be joking. Moreover, it was far from a laughing matter. The situation was grave, and the question that welled up from Pilate's deep cynicism was the disillusioned and despairing cry of his age.

It is this that makes Pilate the preeminently modern man. We readily admit that there are elements of this trial that we can identify with only with difficulty. Obviously Pilate's concern for Caesar's rights is foreign to us. Even more so are the petty rivalries among the Jewish leaders and between these men and Pilate. But our inability to identify does not hold true at this point. On the contrary, here we detect the disillusioned voice of our own culture and recognize the current widespread view, not only that truth in the ultimate sense may be unknowable but that it may in fact not even exist as an object of our inquiries.

In Pilate's day disillusionment with truth was disillusionment with Greek philosophy. Pilate may have been no philosopher, but he was aware, as were all Romans, that the Greeks had excelled in precisely this field and yet had failed to solve the ultimate philosophical questions. The man who had tried hardest was Plato. Plato understood that the basic problem in acquiring knowledge of what is true is that there must be knowledge of more than particulars if there is to be meaning. In the language of philosophy the word "particulars" means "things," those things that we see in the world. We are surrounded by

thousands of them at any given moment, and we know by experience and projection that there are many thousands, indeed millions, more. In a sense we know these particulars because we observe them. But real knowledge is something that goes beyond these individualized things to that general concept or form that gives them meaning.

For example, when we talk about chairs we can easily list many styles and types of chairs, some of them quite different from others. There are rocking chairs, spindle-back chairs, desk chairs, stuffed chairs—the list seems endless. Yet when we speak of a chair we obviously have some general idea of a chair into which these particulars fit. Plato said that what is so obviously true on this level must be true in every other area as well.

But where do these ideals come from? On the level of chairs we may argue that they come from the human mind, and thus we may localize the ultimate meaning of the universe there. But if we do that, we immediately want to ask: But where does the idea of the mind or of man himself come from? And where do we find absolutes in those areas about which men apparently disagree—morals, the proper structuring of human society, religion, and so on? Popular Greek thought answered: From the gods. But then, where does the idea of the gods come from? Plato recognized that in pursuing this necessary kind of argument one must move backward and upward to one great universal from which every meaning comes. But here is the problem. Although Plato and the other Greeks understood the necessity of finding such a grand, overriding universal, they nevertheless never found a place from which the universal could come nor a way in which it could be known surely. It was out of the despair of this search that Plato is reported to have said wistfully, "It may be that some day there will come forth from God a Word who will reveal all mysteries and make everything plain."

After Plato there were other attempts to solve this same great problem, but these were no more successful. Consequently, Greek philosophy gradually descended into a growing cynicism expressed in the "grin-and-bear-it" philosophy of the Stoics, the "if-it-feels-good-do-it" philosophy of the Epicureans, or the "leap-of-faith" philosophy of the

various mystery religions. Pilate knew all this. So he asked (quite correctly from the perspective of the philosophical thought before him), "What is truth?" meaning that speculations in this area had proved both impractical and meaningless.

The Situation Today

One proposed solution to the problem of truth (though it is actually a denial of a solution) is the relativism that has grown out of the philosophy of Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). Hegel was a German professor who, in a series of brilliant books, advanced the proposition that truth is not an absolute but rather is something that is always evolving through the flow of world history. In Hegel's view it is the result of a synthesis which comes about in this fashion. Every fact, theory or "truth" may be called a thesis, which by its very existence produces an antithesis. At first these appear as opposites, but in time they come together to form a synthesis. This synthesis in turn becomes a new thesis producing its own antithesis, and so on. According to this system truth is relative. It depends upon whom you are asking and of what period you are asking. What is true now may not have been true ten or twenty years ago, and it may not be true ten or twenty years from now. Or again, it may be true for me but not for you. This is Hegel's heritage for the modern world.

Most people today speak of what is true or false purely on a subjective basis. That is, they determine whether a thing is true or not on the basis of how it makes them feel.

In the winter of 1976-77, the Public Broadcasting System aired a six-part film series entitled *Scenes From a Marriage.* It was by Ingmar Bergman and was originally for Swedish viewers. On the surface it is merely a perceptive analysis of the breakup of what appears to be an ideal marriage. But it is actually more than that. It is an analysis of our culture, as most Bergman films are, and it is filled with personal and political implications. In the first of these six scenes there is a speech by Johan, the husband, which unintentionally reveals the weaknesses both

of Johan and Marianne, his wife, and of their marriage. They are being interviewed for a national magazine.
They are sitting on a sofa. The interviewer asks, "Are you afraid of the future?"

Johan replies, "If I stopped to think, I'd be petrified with fear. Or so I imagine. So I don't think. I'm fond of this cozy old sofa and that oil lamp. They give me an illusion of security which is so fragile that it's almost comic. I like Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* though I'm not religious, because it gives me feelings of piety and belonging. Our families see a lot of each other and I depend very much on this contact, as it reminds me of my childhood when I felt I was protected. I like what Marianne said about fellow-feeling. It's good for a conscience which worries on quite the wrong occasions. I think you must have a kind of technique to be able to live and be content with your life. In fact, you have to practice quite hard not caring about anything. The people I admire most are those who can take life as a joke. I can't. I have too little sense of humor for a feat like that. You won't print this, will you?"

The speech is devastating. There is a denial of security but a wish for security feelings. There is denial of religious values but a desire for religious feelings. In fact, feelings are all there are. Therefore it is no surprise that the solution to living that Johan puts forward is *technique*—"You must have a kind of technique to be able to live and be content with your life." What happens when the technique fails? The answer is that the marriage breaks up, as this one does. Thus does Bergman dramatize what is happening to our society.

Today as never before, on thousands of campuses and in millions of homes, the question of truth is not even asked. Instead people are asking, "Does it work?" "Is it practical?" "How does it make you feel?" Obviously our own lack of meaning is linked to the failure of this quest, and the declining moral tone of our culture—expressed in presidential scandals, industrial pay-offs, legalized immorality, shoplifting, and many other things—flows from it.

Word to Modern Man

Here we turn to the answer to the modern dilemma, for if Pilate's question is preeminently the modern question, then the statement of Christ which provoked it is preeminently a word to our own disillusioned culture. This is not the first time Jesus had spoken of truth and its nature. Earlier he had spoken of himself as "the truth" (John 14:6). He had called the Holy Spirit the "spirit of truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). He referred to the Bible as "truth" (John 17:17). He even spoke of the need to "worship ... in truth" (John 4:23-24) and to "do" the truth (John 3:21). All these references are totally understandable in view of the Old Testament conception of what truth is and how it functions. But here before Pilate, in the very last references to truth in the entire Gospel, Jesus refers to it in a way which even a Gentile like Pilate could fathom: "For this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of the truth listened to me." This says several important things that Pilate and our own culture need to know.

First, it says that there *is* such a thing as truth and that *truth is an entity.* That is, truth is singular. It is not in fragments that would require us to speak of "truths" in the sense of unrelated facts or items. Truth holds together. Therefore, there is no phase of truth that is not related to every other phase of truth. The nature of God is related to the structure of the atom. The inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible are related to the multiplication table. All things that are true are part of the truth and stand in a proper and inescapable relationship to God, who is himself the truth.

Second, the Lord indicates by his statement that truth is not only an entity, it is *objective.* That is, it is there to be observed and discussed, and we can observe it and discuss it without prejudice.

This is involved in Christ's statement that he has come to bear witness to the truth, as one might to any fact submitted in a court of law.

This has implications in two areas. On the one hand, it says something about the way the

Christian should approach scientific truth. He may approach it dispassionately and analytically. On the other hand, this also says something about the nature of religious truth. For if truth is an entity and truth is objective, then religious truth is not something beyond the range of analysis and verification. It is not something to be reached by a great "leap of faith." Rather, it is something that may be studied and that will therefore inevitably throw light upon our natures and the nature of the universe. Just as the biologist might look through a microscope to study the nature of the microscopic world, so we look through the microscope of the Word to see our true condition. In that Book we find that God has done what needs to be done by sending his Son as our Savior. Jesus died for us. He rose for us. He reigns for us. That is objective truth. Therefore, it may be studied and applied to our lives as any other truth can.

Third, the words of the Lord to Pilate indicate that *truth must come from above,* for when Jesus says that he has come to bear witness to the truth, he implies that in the ultimate sense truth is not of this world but rather must come to this world by revelation.

This is so of all truth. It is true of spiritual truth, of course; for apart from the revelation we have in God's Word, no one would even guess what is disclosed there, let alone really know it. We cannot guess what God is like nor what he has done in Jesus Christ for our salvation. It is also the case, however, with scientific truth, for although it is true that God has given us primarily a book of spiritual truth, not scientific truth, he has nevertheless given us minds capable of perceiving the revelation of himself in nature and actually leads the mind to discover what is to be found there. Sometimes scientists are unaware of this. At other times they know it. It is said that Samuel Morse, the inventor of the telegraph, was once seen bowed over the desk where he was working. "What are you doing?" he was asked.

Morse replied, "I am asking God for help. Every time I go into my laboratory I say, 'O God, I am nothing. Give me wisdom. Give me clarity of mind.'" Morse knew that truth comes from God. Consequently, we are not surprised to learn that the very first message

sent over his new invention was the thankful and wondering question, "What hath God wrought?"

Fourth, the words of our Lord teach that in the ultimate sense *the truth that comes from God has been embodied in a person.* No one would ever imagine this. To us truth is abstract and may be supposed always to remain abstract. We think of truth in terms of equations and figures and propositions. But God says that truth is personal. More than that, it is a person and this person is the Lord Jesus Christ. He himself said unequivocably, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). This is the answer to Plato's quest. Plato had said, "It may be that some day there will come forth from God a Word who will reveal all mysteries and make everything plain." That Word has now come. The Lord is that Word. He is the One who has come to reveal all mysteries and make everything plain to those who will come to him.

Chapter 235.
No Fault in Him at All

John 18:38

In the instructions for the observance of the Passover occurring in Exodus 12 and in other parts of the Old Testament, there is a detail that has bearing on the outcome of the trial of the Lord Jesus Christ before Pilate. These passages tell us that the lamb to be killed in the observance of the Passover was to be "without blemish" (Exod. 12:5; cf. Lev. 22:17-25). In order to make sure that it was without blemish it was to be kept in the home for three days prior to the sacrifice, during which time it was to be examined carefully. Only when it was known to be flawless was it to be used in the Passover ritual.

This has bearing upon the trial of the Lord Jesus Christ before Pilate because in the plan of God he was the true Passover Lamb, who died that the angel of spiritual death might pass over all who trust in his sacrifice. He was examined to this end and found to be without blemish. We might say that at the time of his entry upon his public ministry the

Lord was taken into the house of Israel for three years. At the beginning of that ministry he had been identified as the Lamb of God by John the Baptist, his divinely appointed forerunner. John had pointed him out, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). From that point on the Lord moved in and out among the people of Israel to be examined by them—by friends and enemies alike. None could find fault with him. Now, in what is virtually the last official word pronounced on earth concerning Jesus, the Roman procurator Pilate comes forth in opposition to the determined will of the Jews and even the careless nature of his own conscience to declare Jesus innocent.

He does it three times. First, at the conclusion of the official Roman trial. In this trial Jesus had been accused of making himself to be "Christ, a king," thus an enemy of Caesar. Pilate found the charge unwarranted. After a careful examination of Jesus as to the nature of his supposed kingdom, he appeared to the crowd and declared, "I find no basis for a charge against him" (John 18:38; Luke 23:4).

The second declaration of Jesus' innocence was after Pilate had sent Jesus to Herod and had received him back uncondemned. "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him," Pilate said (John 19:4; cf. Luke 23:14-15).

The last occasion was after Pilate had caused Jesus to be flogged, hoping by this act to satisfy the outraged and vicious mob. Pilate declared, "I find no basis for a charge against him" (John 19:6; cf. Luke 23:22). The leaders of the people were insistent and stirred up the people to cry out repeatedly, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" So at last, Pilate, being unwilling to risk a riot and thus the loss of his own position, gave Christ over to death even though he had found him innocent. However—and this is the point we are making—it is as one uncondemned and, in fact, declared to be blameless that Christ goes to Calvary. It is as God's blameless Lamb that Jesus dies for the sin of this world.

A Universal Verdict

But it was not only by Pilate that this important verdict—"I find no basis for a charge against him"—was given. It has been given by all who have ever examined or been associated with the Lord Jesus. Think of those who had pronounced a verdict of "innocent" upon him.

There is *God the Father,* first of all. At the beginning of Christ's public ministry John the Baptist had identified the Lord as God's Lamb. Although John was a prophet and therefore one to be believed and trusted, we might well want to ask if John is entirely sure of this identification. After all, Israel had waited for hundreds of years for her Messiah, and the waiting of the world for the One who was to crush the head of Satan was even longer. "Is he really the one?" we might ask. "Is this really the blameless Lamb who is to die for the sin of this world?" The issue is not allowed to stand in doubt, for as soon as John has baptized Jesus, the Holy Spirit in a visible form, like a dove, is seen to light upon him; and God's voice is heard from heaven, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22).

Later, on the Mount of Transfiguration, after Jesus had appeared in his glory with Moses and Elijah, the voice was heard again, declaring, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him" (Matt. 17:5; cf. Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35).

A second verdict of "innocent" was pronounced upon Christ by those who knew him best, *his disciples.* There was much about him that they did not know or understand. They did not know the purpose of his ministry, nor did they understand the necessity of his death. But one thing they knew. They had never met anyone who could match the moral excellence of his personality or teaching. John called Christ "the righteous" (1 John 2:1). Peter, in those early sermons recorded in the Book of Acts, called him the "Holy One" (Acts 2:27) and "the Righteous One" (Acts 3:14). In his first epistle he says that Jesus was "without blemish or defect" (1 Peter 1:19). Matthew confessed him as "Immanuel... God with us" (Matt. 1:23). Thomas confessed Christ's

perfection by declaring him "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). All these had rubbed shoulders with Jesus in the closest possible contact. They had done this for the better part of three years. They had seen him in good times and bad, facing the acclaim of the multitudes as well as enduring the insults and outrages of those who were opposed to his teaching. If anyone would have known of a weakness in Christ, these men would have known it. Yet they would unhesitatingly and enthusiastically have confessed with Pilate, "We find no basis for a charge against him."

Again, there is the testimony of *the Jewish leaders.* These men were enemies for the most part. They had no desire to think of Jesus favorably. In fact, the opposite is the case. They hated him and wished to trap him in some folly for which he could then be openly accused or in some violation of the law for which he could be officially condemned. Yet they could not succeed. And when they at last condemned him it was only because he had openly declared himself to be the unique Son of God, which statement they, without any evidence at all, judged to be blasphemy.

But perhaps we are not looking in the right place. We have spoken of the disciples of Christ, who had full opportunity to observe Jesus but who might be thought to be partial. We have spoken of the leaders, who were certainly not favorable to him but who might be said to have lacked adequate opportunity to observe him at close hand. Was there no one who was both in a position to observe Christ closely and at the same time not predisposed to judge him favorably because of friendship or some similar cause? We have no right to expect such a person, but God in his wisdom has provided such a one in *Judas.* Judas was one of the Twelve. He was with Christ throughout his ministry, thereby having full opportunity to observe him. Yet after the betrayal Judas attempted to return the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matt. 27:4). It was the equivalent of saying, "I find no fault in him at all."

Verdict of the Ages

Is that not the verdict of all who have ever associated with the Lord Jesus Christ? We have spoken of those who lived with him during his lifetime and knew him then. But what of those who have associated with him since—both friends and enemies? Is their verdict not identical?

Let us take Christ's friends first of all. These have trusted him as Savior and have been saved from their sin. But their way has not always been smooth. In the providence of God some have suffered great personal disappointment. Some have lost jobs, some families. Some have lost health. Some, like the Old Testament patriarch Job, have lost everything and have been forced to say, as he did, "May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!'... Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb? Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed? For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest" (Job 3:3, 11-13). Yet these have not cursed Christ. They have confessed rather that there is no fault in him at all.

Spurgeon writes of this truth, "Do you not think that out of the millions of Christians who have lived hoping in Christ some one would have told us if it is his habit to disappoint his people? Out of so many believers who dwell with Him surely some one or other of them, when they came to die, would have told us if He is not all that He professes to be. Would not some one or other have confessed, 'I trusted in Christ and he has not delivered me; it is all a delusion'? Surely, out of the many we have seen depart we should have found some one or two that would have let out the secret, and have said, 'He is a deceiver. He cannot save, he cannot help, he cannot deliver.' But never one dying believer throughout the ages has spoken ill of him, but all have said, 'We find no fault at all in him.'"

This is even true in a certain sense of Christ's enemies, at least if they have taken the trouble to examine his character and teachings. They may be opposed to Christianity. They may have no desire at all to follow Jesus. Still there are few critics who have not been impressed

with Christ's person and there are fewer still who would rail against him.

Do you say that there nevertheless are some? Yes, that is true in a sense. But the last word is not in yet, for one day they will be confronted with Christ in his glory and will be forced to confess, in spite of themselves, that he is who he claimed to be and that he is without fault in his conduct both to themselves and others. Paul wrote of that day, saying that "every tongue" shall confess that "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11).

And Yet He Dies

The Lord Jesus Christ passed through every examination that could possibly be made of him and was declared to be blameless. He was weighed in every scale, measured by every standard, by friends and foes alike, and in each case he was found to be innocent. Yet now, although he is officially found to be innocent, he dies. Why is this? Death is the result of sin (Rom. 6:23; cf. 1 Cor. 15:56), but Christ was sinless. Why does the sinless One die?

We may answer the question on two levels. If we look at the question from the human point of view, the answer is that Jesus died as a result of the hatred of the Jewish leaders coupled to the moral cowardice of Pilate. This is only another way of saying that it was because of the rebellion of the human heart against God that Christ was crucified. But this is only one side of the story. The other side, the truly wonderful side, is that Jesus died because God had appointed him to be our sin-bearer.

Recently in my studies I have come across some words that present this truth so well that I quote them here at length. They are by a man who was probably the greatest evangelical preacher in Germany during the middle part of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Wilhelm Krummacher. They have been published in English under the title *The Suffering Savior.* Krummacher writes, "But tell us now, why did Jesus die? 'It is appointed unto sinners once to die, and after that the judgment'; but he

was not a sinner. Even the redeemed have no other way to the heavenly world than through death, because their flesh is corrupted by sin. But in Christ's corporeality this is not the case; and yet he dies, and that in such a dreadful manner! Explain how this is. Take time to reflect. But however long and deeply you may study the subject, we tell you decidedly beforehand that you will not bring forward any rational, convincing, and satisfactory solution to this mystery.

"Hear, therefore, how we view the subject, and consider whether there is room for any other. The monstrous fact that the just and spotless Jesus, notwithstanding his holiness, was condemned to death, would compel us to the conclusion that the doctrine of a righteous God, who rules over all, is a delusion—that the will of man or chance alone govern the world—that there exists no divine retribution upon earth, and that it will not fare the worse with the impious than with the just—I say we should be necessarily compelled to inferences of this kind, if we were not permitted to assume that the immaculate Son of God suffered death in our stead. This view of the subject furnishes the only key to the mystery of the ignominious end of the just and holy Jesus.

"But if we presuppose an atonement made by Christ for sin—and we not only may do so, but are constrained to it by the clear evidence of Holy Writ—then all is plain; all is solved and deciphered, and a sublime meaning and a glorious connection pervades the whole. God threatened Adam in paradise, saying, 'In the day that thou eatest of the fruit of this tree, thou shalt surely die.' We did eat of that fruit and incurred the penalty. But the eternal Son now appears, removes the penalty from us to himself, and we live.

"On Sinai it was said, 'Cursed be everyone who continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.' We did not continue in them, and our fate was decided. But our Surety presents himself, endures the curse for us, and we are justly delivered and absolved. God has resolved to save sinners, notwithstanding he has said, 'I will blot the name of him that sinneth out of my book.' We believe in our salvation, for he inflicted upon Christ the punishment due to us. God promised the crown of life only to the obedient; but after

Christ as our representative obeyed in our name, God can bestow the crown on sinners and yet continue holy.

'Thus all becomes clear, and the most striking opposites harmoniously agree. And yet men dare to call our doctrine of the atonement made by Christ irrational, and even absurd. Look how Pilate unconsciously stands in the breach for us, by testifying to the truth that Jesus was not guilty of death. Attempt in a satisfactory and rational manner, if you can, to explain it otherwise than by the atonement made by Christ, how it was that even the holy and immaculate Son of God paid the wages of sin."

No Health in Us

Yes, he is the guiltless one. But we are guilty. Of him it was said, "I find no basis for any charge against him." There was no fault to be found with Jesus. But of which of us can those words rightly be spoken? No fault in me? No fault in you? Impossible! Rather we are riddled with faults. As the ancient collect says, "We have done those things we ought not to have done; we have left undone those things we ought to have done; and there is no health in us." We have rebelled against God's righteous rule. We have broken his laws and have defaced his image in us. We deserve his just condemnation. We deserve to die. But at this point the glory of the gospel comes in. For Jesus, the Righteous One, has died for us that we might be saved from condemnation.

Has he died for you? Do you know that personally? If not, you can know it merely by committing yourself to him. You can say, "Lord Jesus Christ, I know that I am a sinner. I deserve to die for my sin, but you have died for me. I trust you as having become my Savior in your death. Receive me now as one of your followers. I promise to follow and serve you from this time forth, forever." If you will honestly pray that prayer, you are already his, for he has received you, having already done the marvelous work of regeneration in your heart.

Chapter 236.
Christ before Herod

John 18:38

The verdict of Pontius Pilate that the Lord Jesus Christ was innocent of the charges brought against him should have been followed by an immediate release of the prisoner. Or, if Pilate had reason to believe that the Jews would harm Jesus in spite of his judgment, he should have put the Lord into protective custody, as the Romans later did with the apostle Paul (Acts 21:31ff.). But when Pilate announced his verdict publicly the decision met with such opposition from the rulers and the crowds that Pilate immediately backed away from the only proper and noble course and instead attempted to bring about the release of Jesus indirectly.

He made three attempts to do this. One was to have Jesus beaten, thereby hoping to evoke pity from the bloodthirsty mob. A second was to honor the custom of releasing one prisoner at the feast which, he suggested, might be followed by releasing Jesus. A third attempt, the first Pilate tried, was to send the Lord Jesus Christ to Herod Antipas.

Pilate's attempt to pass the buck was unsuccessful, as such attempts usually are. He was attempting to pass the responsibility for dealing with Christ to Herod, but the matter simply came back to him. He could not escape it. No more can those today escape when confronted with the person of Christ and asked to take a stand for him.

Herod Antipas

Herod Antipas was a son of Herod the Great, who had commanded the babes of Bethlehem to be killed in hopes of destroying the so-called "King of the Jews" about whom he had been informed by the wise men (Matt. 2:1-18). Old Herod was a dissolute and dangerous creature. He had had ten wives and had murdered a number of them as well as several of his children. This had led the emperor Augustus to say of him that it was better to be Herod's pig than one of his sons. But however

base the father was, this was even more true of the son. Antipas was a libertine of the worst sort. Thus, although he governed adequately for a time, he lacked that ruthless tenacity of purpose that had served his father well and so was eventually removed by the Romans.

Herod Antipas did not rule all that Herod the Great had ruled. One of the father's wills had designated Antipas his sole successor. But there had been various wills, and the matter was finally disposed by Augustus in the following fashion. One son, Archelaus, was given the area of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea; that is, the southernmost region. He was termed an ethnarch. A second son, Philip, was given the area of the Decapolis; that is, the region to the east. Herod received the title of tetrach and was given the provinces of Galilee and Perea; that is, the northernmost sector of the father's kingdom.

We know a few more things about Herod. For one thing, he is the ruler who arrested and then later killed John the Baptist. John had criticized Herod for having taken his brother's divorced wife, Herodias, while his brother was still living, and Herod had arrested John for it. At this stage Herod seemed to have some sensibility toward religious things, for he respected John and even listened to him. But after he had killed John, this rapidly degenerated to mere superstition. Thus, when told of Jesus' preaching and works, Herod imagined that he was John the Baptist risen from the dead (Matt. 14:1-2; Mark 6:14-16). Later, whether correct or incorrect, the rumor reached Jesus that Herod was seeking to kill him also (Luke 13:31). Jesus replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal'" (vv. 32-33). "Fox" was an apt designation for Antipas, for he was indeed a crafty and cunning man held under the debilitating influences of a licentious woman.

In Herod's Court

Here we must leave John's Gospel and go to Luke, for Luke alone of all the Gospel writers tells of this incident. His account is as follows: "On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who

was also in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies" (23:6-12).

This brief account tells us much about Herod. For one thing, it tells us that Herod was aware of much that was going on in his province. We know this because we are told that "from what he had heard" of Jesus "he hoped to see him perform some miracle." Second, it tells us that he had a certain curiosity about Jesus, for he was "greatly pleased" to see him. Third, however, and more seriously, it discloses more of Herod's spiritual decline, for on this occasion the reproving voice of conscience seems to be entirely absent, and we find him looking upon this solemn confrontation as simply an occasion for entertainment. When this turned out disappointingly, the curiosity with which he began soon curdled into stark contempt and cruelty.

Herod's experience should be a warning to many similarly minded persons who frequent places of Christian worship out of curiosity and are only hardened. The Lord did not reveal himself to Herod. He did not speak. God will not reveal the precious things of his Word to anyone's idle curiosity.

Curiosity Not Enough

The true measure of the tragedy which was Herod is seen, in that which in other circumstances might be thought good.

First, there is this matter *of Herod's curiosity.* God will not reveal the precious things of his Word to idle curiosity, but this does not mean that curiosity itself is all bad or that God will not on occasion use it to draw a person to him. We recall, for example, that Jesus played upon the

curiosity both of Nicodemus and of the woman of Samaria in attempting to lead them to the truth about his mission. To Nicodemus he spoke cryptically of the new birth, prompting the aging leader of Israel to ask, "How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he cannot enter the second time into his mother's womb to be born!" (John 3:4). To the woman of Samaria he spoke of living water, causing her to reply, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" (John 4:11-12). Curiosity itself is not bad, and this much at least can be said concerning Herod, that his curiosity had been stirred regarding Jesus.

How had it been stirred? Obviously by hearing much about him. What Jesus was doing had been the common talk of the kingdom for the space of three years, and much of this had undoubtedly come to the dissolute tetrarch's attention. He could hardly have failed to hear of Jesus' feeding of the four and five thousand, for these feedings had taken place in or near Galilee and had been accompanied by significant popular movements by those who wished to make Jesus king. Jesus had walked on the water in Galilee. He had stilled the storm. He had healed the son of a Galilean nobleman. There were other miracles. Then, in addition to these miracles, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead in Bethany just a week before, and the news of this great miracle had apparently spread through Jerusalem like wildfire. Herod may not have heard of all these miracles, but the main ones had undoubtedly been brought to his attention. It was undoubtedly because of this that he wished to see Jesus do some wonder.

Moreover, it was not just through idle rumor that Herod had heard of Jesus. Herod had also heard of him through John the Baptist. We have no record of what John actually said to Herod. But we can hardly imagine that John, having received an opportunity to speak to Herod, would have failed to point to Jesus. Herod may even have heard John's great text and testimony: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

We note one other fact also. There was in Herod's household one who undoubtedly knew much about Jesus, if indeed he was not a full believer. He is none other than the husband of Joanna, one of the women who traveled about with Jesus and ministered to him out of her substance (Luke 8:3). The husband's name was Chuzas, and he is identified as Herod's steward. If Herod was interested in Jesus, as he undoubtedly was, he would have inquired about him and would undoubtedly have received information about him from his steward. Yet Herod's curiosity remained only an idle curiosity. He made no effort to see Jesus and learn from him, even when his remorse over his treatment of John the Baptist was at its zenith.

Joy and Expectation

There are two more things that might be said in Herod's favor were they not so deeply corrupted. The first is that, in consequence of his curiosity, Herod is said to have *rejoiced at seeing Jesus.* In fact, we are told that he was "greatly pleased" (Luke 6:8). Again, we are told that Herod was glad because he *"hoped to see him perform a miracle.* "Are not we who follow Christ also glad in the same expectation? We too hope to see some great miracles done by him. When the gospel is preached, we hope to see those who are dead in trespasses and sins brought to spiritual life. When the teachings of Christ are put forth, we hope to see lives turned about, sin repented of, and many urged on in the straight way which Christ sets before them. Again, upon ourselves we also hope to see some miracle. We wish our eyes opened to some new and marvelous thing out of God's Word. We wish our wills changed that we might seek him with all our heart. We wish to be convicted of sin and urged on in righteousness. We wish to be made like Jesus.

Yes, we desire these things. But this godly joy and spiritual expectation were not the joy and expectation of Herod. He was "exceedingly glad," but it was a frivolous gladness, just as his curiosity was an idle curiosity. He was expectant, but it was a base expectation. He hoped only to see some wonder with which he might later entertain his guests

at some low banquet and orgy. Each would have his stories. But Herod's story of a miracle done by the Galilean peasant would top them all.

A Hardened Conscience

That brings us to these points of conclusion. It is not that curiosity, joy, and expectation are bad in themselves. They are good. We might even argue that they have been given to us by God, that they, like all God's good gifts, might lead us to him. What is wrong is that in many persons they have been perverted through the hardening effect of sin.

There is no true approach to God without a painful awareness of one's own sin. This is because God is holy, and we cannot approach him in his holiness without a corresponding exposure of our own corruption. When God approached Adam and Eve in the Garden, after the fall, they hid from him because they knew they were naked (Gen. 3:10). When Isaiah saw God high and lifted up and heard the seraphim singing of his holiness, he fell back, crying, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty" (Isa. 6:5). When Peter caught a glimpse of who Jesus really is on the occasion of his miracle in providing a great catch of fish in Galilee, Peter responded, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). Clearly Herod had undergone this kind of experience (though without profit), for the preaching of John the Baptist concerning the immorality of his life had troubled him.

In proper circumstances the conviction of sin should lead, first, to repentance, and second, to faith in Jesus Christ where alone the penalty and guilt of sin are dealt with. But where this does not take place—where conviction of sin does not lead both to repentance and faith—unconfessed sin hardens, and eventually the one who was once genuinely convicted can regard religious matters only with an idle curiosity or even antagonism.

These were the steps in Herod's fall. First, there was a genuine conviction of sin. But Herod did not welcome this conviction, being

unwilling to part from his sin. He wished to be religious and keep his sin too. Therefore, second, he attempted to still the voice of conscience which, in this case, meant stilling the voice of John the Baptist. At first he tried prison. But once launched upon this course, he soon came to the position of murdering John both to satisfy Salome and also to rescue his own imagined honor. Third, having silenced the voice of conscience, which always insists upon the indispensible place of morality in true religion, Herod's religious instincts turned to superstition. He thought that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead. Fourth, superstition turned to raw unbelief, for when Herod finally did have Jesus before him he looked upon him only as one who might be prevailed upon to do a trick for the amusement of himself and his court. Fifth and finally, when Jesus declined to perform for this by now rank profligate and unbeliever, Herod's interest turned to derision, and he and his men of war viciously scoffed at Jesus. Having silenced him who was the Voice, it was no marvel that Herod now failed to hear or appreciate the Word.

God Is Not Mocked

You cannot treat God lightly. You cannot mock him. If you would meet him, you must be serious about the encounter, more serious than you have ever been about anything in your life before, and you must be ready to be changed profoundly by him.

What is God anyway? An intellectual curiosity? Someone who exists to provide you with free entertainment or free blessings? Is he as idle as you? Is he as frivolous? He is the great, holy, omnipotent God of the universe who takes the business of being God seriously. "I am the Lord your God," he says. 'You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:2-3). 'You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. You shall not covet" (vv. 13-17). "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). "Be holy" (1 Peter 1:16; cf. Lev. 11:44). Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24).

That is what God requires. If you will not do that, then your religious sensibilities will decline, as did Herod's. And the time will come when Jesus will depart from your presence, never to return. On the other hand, if you will repent of your sin and turn to him, then you will find that he has already received you and is at work to lead you in the way of righteousness. Will you come? Will you not turn your back on that sin that holds you in its grip and follow Jesus?

Chapter 237.
Barabbas

John 18:39-40

Christians will agree that if God is truly the sovereign God the Scriptures portray him to be, then nothing in the world is without meaning. The stars have their meaning. So do the fish of the sea, the animals, the events of history. It is true that we may not always see their meaning or understand their purposes. But they are there all the same and can teach us something.

If this is true of the Creation and the events of history in general, as it obviously is, it is certainly true of the events surrounding the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. From a secular perspective these events may be imagined to have fallen out at random as a product of the unpredictable interaction of the leaders of Israel with their particular animosities toward Jesus and the character and desires of Pilate. But this is not the case. It is true that the leaders of the people and Pilate did interact and that events flowed from this interaction, but what resulted was no mere accident. Rather it was that which had been specifically predetermined and even foretold prophetically by God. It was foretold that the Messiah would be betrayed by Judas (Ps. 41:9; Zech. 11:12), and be rejected and scorned by his own people (Isa. 53:3). Specific prophecies include the use of false witnesses (Ps. 35:11), Christ's silence before his accusers (Isa. 53:7), his beatings (Isa. 50:6), his being offered gall and vinegar to drink (Ps. 69:21), his being crucified with

thieves (Isa. 53:12), his being pierced by a spear (Zech. 12:10), and his burial in the tomb of a rich man (Isa. 53:9). Each of these details teaches particular lessons about the work of Christ and the meaning of the Atonement.

An Important Detail

In the midst of these many predetermined and therefore meaningful details, there is a special story that is fascinating, not only for what it teaches about the death of the Lord, but also for the emphasis the Gospels give to it. It is unusual to find any given event from the life of Christ contained in all four Gospels, for the simple reason that these are not mere history but are specific portraits of Christ emphasizing one or more aspects of his life and ministry. Yet this story, the story of Barabbas, is in all four Gospels. And not only that, it occupies an important place in them (particularly in Matthew, Mark, and Luke). If we count carefully, we discover thirty-eight verses used to tell this story. This is more even than the account of the betrayal of Christ by Judas and certainly more than the accounts of those parts of the trial that only one or two of the Gospels give to us.

On the surface the story is simple enough. In fact, it is so simple that John, who recounts it in the shortest space of all, uses only three verses to do so.

The basis of the story lies in Pilate's desire to see Jesus released even though his accusers were clamoring for his death. He could have insisted on the Lord's release. But Pilate was trying to satisfy the crowds too (which is usually an impossible position to be in), so he began to search about for indirect ways to free Jesus. His first attempt had been to send him to Herod, which he was able to do because Jesus had come from Galilee and might therefore be thought to fall under the jurisdiction of the Galilean tetrarch. In a few moments he would have Christ flogged, thinking that by that act he might evoke a measure of sympathy from the mob. But before this last expedient, he hit upon another idea that at the time must have struck him as particularly fortuitous.

Pilate recalled a custom in Israel according to which—as a symbol of the mercy of God and as a reminder of their own historical deliverance out of bondage in Egypt—the people were permitted to ask at the Passover festival for the liberation of some offender who was at that moment in prison. We may suppose that as Pilate remembered this his face brightened and he moved to seize upon it as some shipwrecked sailor might seize upon a floating plank as his means of salvation. Perhaps he could use this custom to effect the release of Jesus. Pilate therefore searched through his mind to recall some criminal so notable that, were he to make the choice between this one and Jesus, the criminal would never be chosen by the people. He thought of Barabbas, who, we are told, was a robber (John 18:40), an insurrectionist, and a murderer (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19). Matthew tells us that he was a "notorious prisoner" (Matt. 27:16). Who, Pilate thought, would ever prefer this vile rebel and murderer to the One in whom he had found no fault at all?

It may have been with pride and a certain smugness in the anticipated success of his plan that Pilate now went to the rostrum to offer the people this choice. "It is your custom," he said "for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover" (John 18:39). "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matt. 27:17).

How wise Pilate thought he was, yet how foolishly he acted! For to his immense surprise the crowd, goaded by the rulers, immediately rejected Christ and chose Barabbas. "Give us Barabbas," was their cry (John 18:40).

"What shall I do then with Jesus, who is called Christ?" The people cried out,

"Crucify him!" (Matt. 27:22-23).

It was a disaster. Here Krummacher writes, "The Savior's fate is now no longer in Pilate's hands. The majority of the multitude decides, and he is obliged to abide by its decision. Had he been bold enough to follow the dictate of his own conscience and to have said with calm

discrimination, 'Justice shall be done, even though the world should perish; the guiltless Nazarene is free, and those cohorts here will know how to give effect to my decision,' his opponents inwardly rebuked, would doubtless have shrunk back thunderstruck, and the people, roused from their delusion, would have loudly applauded the energetic judge. But Pilate now stands forever as a warning example of the consequence of endeavoring to satisfy both God, who speaks within us, and the world."

The World's Choice

And, of course, it was the world! And the decision of the mob was the world's decision! The world will ever choose a robber, insurrectionist, or murderer to the guiltless Christ. Why? Because Barabbas is of the world and is the world. Barabbas is one of them, and however dangerous he may be, he is at least controllable. They can handle him. But how do you handle Jesus?

Tom Skinner writes of this in *Words of Revolution.* "Barabbas is the guy who was going to destroy the system. Barabbas was going to burn them out. Barabbas was going to kill them. Why would they want Barabbas? It's very simple. If you let Barabbas go, and he starts another disturbance or another riot, you can always call out the National Guard, the federal troops or the Marines to put his thing down. All you have to do is push a few tanks into his neighborhood and you can squash whatever he's up to. You can find out where he's keeping his guns and raid his apartment. You can always stop Barabbas. But the question is: *how do you stop Jesus?* How do you stop a Man who has no guns, no tanks, no ammunition, but still is shaking the whole Roman empire? How do you stop a Man, who—without firing a shot—is getting revolutionary results? They figured there's only one answer—get rid of him. They made the same mistake people have made down through the history of man. They thought you could get rid of the idea by getting rid of the man from whom the idea comes. So they said, 'We can get rid of Jesus. We don't want him to rule over us.' "Barabbas would never really ask to run your life. Barabbas would exploit you, but he wouldn't ask to run your life. Jesus would ask to run your life. Jesus would ask for the

right to rule over you! And that's the problem. Men would rather be enslaved to tyranny than let Jesus rule their lives. They would rather be exploited than let Christ determine their lives. So they said, 'Give us Barabbas.'"

The crime of Barabbas was the same crime of which the Jewish leaders had accused Christ falsely, and their position in Israel was certainly not enhanced by Barabbas's release. Yet they chose him, so great was their opposition to Jesus.

The Sinner's Salvation

We have looked at the story of Barabbas through two sets of eyes: those of Pilate and those of the leaders of the people. Each view contains great lessons. Yet the greatest lessons are to be seen, not through the eyes of Pilate or even the eyes of the leaders, but through the eyes of Barabbas himself. From this perspective the story of Barabbas is the story of stories, for it is the story of the sinner's salvation through Jesus' death on Calvary.

We notice in the first place, as we have not noticed until now, that the name Barabbas is an Aramaic word meaning "son of a father." *Bar* means "son," and *abba* means "father." So the word itself signifies that Barabbas is a representative type of all the sons of all the fathers who have ever been born into this world. As Donald Grey Barnhouse writes in his valuable comments on this story, "We are all of Adam's race. We have been bound over for our sedition against God. We are robbers of his glory. We are murderers of our souls and the souls of others. We find ourselves bound in the darksome prison house of sin. We feel in our hearts that we merit the sentence that has been announced to us and we wait in trembling for the time of judgment. Every man loves freedom. To be put in a cell is a horrible curtailment of human liberty, and the necessity of such confinement shows what society thinks of the terrible outbreaks that endanger the smooth flow of what men call civilization."

Barnhouse continues, "The Roman soldiery had stopped the riot and had taken Barabbas. His blood-guiltiness was established. He was flung in

his cell, there to wait the moment of his death. A man who is to be hanged has difficulty in keeping his hand away from his throat where the rope is soon to choke him. I have been told by a chaplain in a prison where men are executed in a gas chamber that the condemned practice long breathing, and sometimes will hold their breath until it seems that their eyes will pop from their sockets. They know that they are going to be put into a gas chamber and that they will hear a little hissing sound of incoming death, and that the breath they are now forcing into their lungs will be the last that they shall ever know. They will hold on and on, straining at the thongs that tie them to their chair, until they are forced by the inexhorable law of breathing to exhale the last breath that contained pure oxygen and take in the death that floats around them.

"Barabbas must have looked at the palms of his hands and wondered how it would feel to have the nails ripping through the flesh. He must have remembered scenes of crucifixion death, and the slow agony of the victims who suffered at times for a day or two before merciful death came to release them. He must have awakened with a start if he heard any hammering in the jail, and his mind must have anticipated the sound of the clanging hammers that would bring death near to him. And then, in his prison, he heard the vague murmuring of the crowd that roared outside like the murmur of a troubled sea. He thinks he hears his own name. He can tell that there are angry cries, and fear rises in his heart. Then he hears the sound of a key in the lock, and a jailer comes to him and releases him from the chain that is wound around him, for the Bible tells that he was bound. He must have thought that his time had come, but the jailer takes him to the door and tells him that he is free.

"In his stupefaction he moves toward the crowd. There is little welcome for him, and he senses the deep preoccupation of the people. If he meets one of his old companions in the crowd, he is greeted with but a moment's word, and then he hears the surging roar, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' In modern language he would say to his companions, 'What's the pitch? Give me the lowdown!' And he would be briefly answered that the roar is against Jesus, and that he is to be crucified, and that the crowd had cried out for the release of Barabbas.

"Stunned, he walks nearer to the center of the scene and sees the man who is to die in his place. Finally the procession begins toward Golgatha. He follows and sees Jesus fall under the weight of the cross. He sees Simon of Cyrene pressed by the soldiers to fall in line and carry the cross, and finally they arrive at Calvary. What must have been his thoughts? He hears the echoing blows of the hammer striking the nails, and looks down at his own hands. He had thought that this would be his day. He had thought that the nails would tear his flesh. And here he is breathing the air of springtime and looking at the dark cloud that is gathering in the sky. Does he say, 'Those hammer blows were meant for me, but he is dying in my place'? He could have said it in literal truth that day.

'The cross is lifted up and he sees the silhouette against the sky. The sun grows dark and he hears voices that come to him like thunder. 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' The centurion passes near him, and seeing the look upon his face, says, 'Truly this was the Son of God.' And Barabbas, more than before, looks with wonder and amazement at the man who is dying for him. There comes a cry, 'It is finished,' and a little while later he sees the soldiers take down the body and put it in its temporary grave. He goes back to the city, and all the little things that he had expected to see no more come before his eyes with freshness of new creation. 'He took my place. Jesus took my place. They released me, Barabbas, who deserved to die, and they crucified Jesus instead of me. He took my place. He died instead of me.'"

Barnhouse concludes, "Barabbas was the only man in the world who could say that Jesus Christ took his physical place. But I can say that Jesus Christ took my spiritual place. For it was I who deserved to die. It was I who deserved that the wrath of God should be poured upon me. I deserved the eternal punishment of the lake of fire. He was delivered up for my offenses. He was handed over to judgment because of my sins. This is why we speak of the substitutionary atonement. Christ was my substitute. He was satisfying the debt of divine justice and holiness. That is why I say that Christianity can be expressed in the three phrases:

I deserved Hell; Jesus took my Hell; there is nothing left for me but his Heaven."

The scriptural key to the scene is found in the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Jesus died that we might live. He was bound that we, who have all our lifetimes been subject to the bondage of sin, might be set free.

Set Free

Are you set free? Or, if I may put it this way, are you one who has chosen to remain in the dungeon to which your sins have confined you? We have imagined in the previous paragraphs how Barabbas undoubtedly received his unexpected good fortune. We have supposed that he left the prison and returned to freedom. Could we imagine it otherwise?

Suppose word had come to Barabbas that he was now free and that another prisoner, Jesus, would be dying. Suppose he replied this way: "What you are telling me cannot be true. It may apply to someone else, someone who has committed a lesser offense than I. But I am a great sinner and criminal. No, I cannot believe it. I must stay here." And suppose he had resisted when the guards attempted to remove his chains and release him? We can hardly imagine such a response. Yet this is the response of some to whom the gospel of the substitutionary atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ is preached. They think that it is for another and so do not respond to that which to them is life.

Suppose again that Barabbas had acted in this way. Suppose he had said, "I refuse to accept such a pardon, because what I have done was entirely justified. I was right to rob and murder and commit insurrection. I will not go unless the representative of Rome comes to apologize for the way I have been treated and provides me with a bill of absolvement." In that case, Barabbas would have died, for it is a principle of law that a pardon is a gift and no man can ever be compelled to accept a gift. Chief Justice Marshall ruled in the case of

the condemned murderer George Wilson, who refused his pardon: "A pardon is a slip of paper. The value of the pardon is determined by the acceptance of it by the person to be pardoned. If it is refused, it is no pardon! Wilson must be hanged." We might judge such a reaction foolish, as it is. But it is a possible one, and the consequences are certain.

Again, suppose Barabbas had responded to the announcement of his liberty that he would prefer to reform himself first of all: "By this means I will prove that I have earned my freedom and truly deserve it." The magistrates would have answered that however good a man he might yet become (or not become), this nevertheless has no bearing on the crimes he has already committed and for which he was condemned to die. Future reformation cannot atone for past sin. Consequently, Barabbas's only hope was in the pardon provided through the death of the innocent Christ.

Did Barabbas reply in any one of these ways? We know he did not. In fact, it is highly unlikely that any one of them even occurred to him, so anxious was he to leave the prison and return to a free life outside.

Why then should you do differently? A pardon is offered. Jesus has died. Will you not accept his death in place of your own and quickly go forth to serve him? Charles Wesley, the brother of the famed Methodist evangelist and preacher, John Wesley, did precisely that and wrote about it in one of our greatest hymns.

> And can it be that I should gain
> An interest in the Savior's blood?
> Died He for me, who caused His pain?
> For me, who Him to death pursued?
> Amazing love! how can it be
> That Thou, my God,
> shouldst die for me? He
> left His Father's throne
> above, So free, so infinite
> His grace!

Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race! 'Tis mercy all, immense and free, For, O my God, it found out me.
Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night.
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray;
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light! My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
No condemnation now
I dread: Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

If you have been languishing in the gloomy dungeon of your unbelief, you may do as Wesley and so many others have done. Believe the gospel, and go forth to serve that One who out of the great measure of his love gave himself for your freedom.

Chapter 238.
"Behold the Man!"

John 19:1-5

The eighteenth and nineteenth chapters of John's Gospel deal with the trials of Jesus of Nazareth beginning with his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and culminating in his crucifixion, as recorded in John 19:16-30. But strictly speaking, what we have in the first part of chapter 19 is not a trial. In fact, we have not been dealing with a trial in any strict sense since Pilate's initial verdict of acquittal recorded in verse 38 of the preceding chapter. Jesus is still in the hands of the Roman procurator; the words that were to deliver him over to be crucified have not been uttered. But the trial actually ended earlier when Pilate said, "I find no basis for any charge against him."

What occurs in the interval between the formal verdict of acquittal (John 18:38) and the execution of Jesus (John 19:16-30) is a series of attempts by Pilate to escape the people's wishes.
He knew Jesus was innocent of the charges brought against him; but since the rulers wanted Jesus crucified, Pilate (1) sent Jesus to Herod hoping that Herod would solve his dilemma, (2) attempted to release Jesus instead of Barabbas in honor of Jewish custom, and (3) caused Jesus to be beaten, hoping by this means to evoke pity from the leaders and mob. None of these stratagems worked. But each, as we have already begun to see, shows much about the nature of the human heart and its sin as well as about God's plan for the redemption of the race through Jesus' crucifixion.

Each event is pregnant with meaning, for never in the entire history of the world has so much, done in so short a time, been so significant.

What Man Is This?

It was asked on an earlier occasion when Jesus had stilled the wind and waves on the Sea of Galilee, "What manner of man is this?" We may well ask the same question as we see him brought forth by Pilate after the merciless scourging by the soldiers of Rome. Here was One who, though he had been beaten unjustly, nevertheless bore himself with such dignity that the invitation of Pilate to "behold the man" is to see that which clearly overwhelms us. We hear the invitation: "*Ecce homo*

(Behold the man!)" We look, and we conclude, "Never in all the history of the world has there been one like Jesus!"

Let me challenge you to behold him. Behold him first before Pilate, and ask, "Who is this one who stands before Pilate, beaten to the point of death, wearing a purple robe, crowned with thorns, ridiculed as the carnival King of the Jews?"

First of all, he is an innocent man. No crime has been proven against him. And not only has he already been pronounced innocent by Pilate, he is to be pronounced innocent several times more. It was the verdict of all who had dealings with him in these hours. First, Judas declared, "I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood" (Matt. 27:4). Second, Pilate's wife sent to the Roman procurator, saying, "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him" (Matt. 27:19). Third, Pilate himself declared Christ innocent: "I find no basis for a charge against him" (John 18:38). Fourth, Herod found Christ blameless, for Pilate reported of Herod's verdict, "Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death" (Luke 23:15). Fifth, the dying thief expostulated, "We are punished justly; for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:41). Sixth, the centurion in charge of the crucifixion said, "Surely this was a righteous man" (Luke 23:47). Lastly, the crowds at the cross, seeing the earthquake and the other supernatural signs accompanying his death, exclaimed, "Surely this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54).

This is the verdict of all who have looked at Jesus of Nazareth closely. It is the verdict of God and man, friend and foe, ancient and modern—as pointed out in a previous study.

As we look at Jesus before Pilate we also notice that he is a brave man. He had been beaten mercilessly, yet there is nothing cringing or compromising about his bearing. We have never seen a scourging, so it is hard to imagine the suffering involved in it. We should remember that the victim was stripped of clothing and tied to a post in a way that fully exposed the back. Being struck with a long leather thong (into which

sharp pieces of lead, bone, and rock had been inserted) literally tore the person's back into strips. Besides, the beating was so prolonged that few remained conscious throughout the ordeal and some died. Jesus bore this. Yet it was after his suffering that Pilate led him forth and called the people to "Behold the man!"

Was there wonder, even admiration in Pilate's voice as he said this? There is room to think so. I suspect that William Barclay is on the right track when he writes: "It must have been Pilate's first intention to awaken the pity of the Jews. 'Look!' he said. 'Look at this poor, bruised, bleeding creature! Look at this wretchedness! Can you possibly wish to hound a creature like this to an utterly unnecessary death?' But even as he said it, we can almost hear the tone of Pilate's voice change and see the wonder dawn in his eyes. And instead of saying it half-contemptuously, to awaken pity, he says it with a dawning wonder and an admiration that will not be repressed." In wartime soldiers will frequently admire the bravery of a defeated enemy, wondering how they themselves might bear up under similar suffering were the roles reversed. Did Pilate, an old soldier, perhaps inwardly respect Christ's fortitude?

But it is not only bravery that we see in the man before Pilate. There is also majesty, and such majesty as befits the Son of God. Behold the man? Yes. But behold the King, too! And here we do not mean merely the mock king of the soldiers' devising. We mean the true King, the King of kings, whose dignity and grace shone through even in the moment of his greatest physical humiliation. This was a great man. But this was also God, as the resurrection was soon to indicate (Rom. 1:4).

Before the Crowds

Jesus appeared that day not only before Pilate. He also appeared before the crowds. Indeed, this seems to be the reason for the scourging; for with the stage presence and sense of audience psychology characteristic of a great trial lawyer, Pilate first seemed to pronounce him innocent and then suddenly produced him to have the crowd see him in his beaten and humiliated state. We know what Pilate expected—an

upsurge of pity from the fickle mob. But Pilate miscalculated, for there broke forth a new round of hatred and hostility against Jesus.

Why was this? Why did the presence of Jesus incite such violent hatred? Some writers have suggested that it was an easily understood pattern of psychological reaction: the people saw mirrored in the beaten and disfigured Jesus that moral deformity that they saw, or feared to discover, in themselves. It would be similar to that distaste that so many show for the poor, the deformed, or the dead. There is fear that they will be like them. But this is not the real explanation of the crowd's increasing opposition to and hatred of Jesus. The thing that bothered them about Jesus on this occasion was what had bothered them all along. It was his sinlessness, the awareness of which was heightened by the entirely unwarranted scourging of Jesus and their culpability in that injustice. None care to admit it, but there is in the unsaved person's heart that which leads people to oppose true righteousness.

In his commentary on John, Harry Ironside tells of a meeting of the Synod of the Free Church of Scotland many years ago. One minister was invited to preach the sermon on a particular Sunday morning, and he gave a marvelous oration on the beauty of virtue. He concluded, "Oh, my friends, if virtue incarnate could only appear on earth, men would be so ravished with her beauty that they would fall down and worship her." Many went out saying, "What a magnificent oration that was!"

The same evening another man preached. He did not preach about virtue and beauty. He preached Christ and him crucified. As he closed his sermon he said, "My friends, Virtue Incarnate *has* appeared on earth, and men instead of being ravished with his beauty and falling down and worshipping him, cried out, 'Away with him! Crucify him! We will not have this man to rule over us!'" The second man was right. We do not like to hear it. We resent those who tell us. But the truth is that the natural man hates God's holiness and will do anything rather than allow the light of Christ to penetrate his own deep darkness.

The Masses Today

Third, I want you to "behold the man" as he appears before the masses today. It is the same man, the same Jesus of Nazareth. But while it is true that some do hate him and openly seek to destroy his influence and even his good name, most in our day simply ignore him and thus add insult to injury, suggesting by their neglect that he is hardly worthy of attention.

Those who work on the campuses of our country think this is the case. I received an appeal letter from the head of a large Christian college organization. It said in part, "Some of these institutions and their faculty are openly hostile to the Christian faith. Their students ridicule the Bible and those who believe it. At other schools, God is simply ignored." I would like to have asked this leader how he would balance the percentages. Are most hostile? Or are most unconcerned? I believe that most are unconcerned, or at least try to be. And if this is true on the campuses, it is even more true of the nation at large. Most people will talk about anything but Christianity. And if we were to judge matters by the secular press and other media, we would be hard pressed to know that Jesus even existed, let alone discover anything accurate or significant about him.

To these we wish to say, *"Behold the* master! Do not look away. Do not be too busy. It would be tragic were you to gain the whole world and lose your soul." Yet this is precisely what many will do. They will be lost and not even know they are lost until the reality of the final judgment comes grimly upon them.

Jesus spoke of this shortly before his crucifixion. In the sermon given on the Mount of Olives in the middle of his last week in Jerusalem, Jesus used three gripping parables to teach what the final judgment would be like for such people. One parable was about ten virgins who had been invited to a wedding banquet. Five were wise and five were foolish. The five wise virgins prepared for the banquet by buying oil for their lamps. The five foolish virgins did not. As they waited in the long evening hours all the attendants fell asleep. Suddenly a cry went forth, "Behold the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him." They rose, but the five foolish virgins had no oil for their lamps. On the advice of the

wise they set out to buy some. But while they were getting their oil the bridegroom came and the wedding party followed him into the house and the door was shut. Later the five foolish virgins returned and called at the door, "Lord, Lord, open to us."

But he answered, "Truly, I do not know you."

Jesus concluded, "Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (Matt. 25:13).

The second parable was about three servants. Their master was to go on a journey. So he called the servants to him and gave each money: to the first, five talents; to the second, two talents; and to the third, one talent —each according to his ability. Then he went away, and the servants who had received five talents and two talents respectively invested the money while the third servant hid his talent in the ground. After a long time the master returned and asked for an accounting. The man who had received five talents produced those talents plus five more. The servant who had received two talents produced two talents plus two more. But the one who had been given only one talent returned only that one to the Lord, saying, "Master, I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you" (Matt. 25:24-25). The master condemned that servant, taking away his talent and casting him forth "into the darkness" (v. 30).

Finally, the Lord told the parable of the separation of the sheep from the goats. The goats are the lost, and they are condemned because they neglected to feed the Lord when he was hungry, give him drink when he was thirsty, welcome him when he was a stranger, clothe him when he was naked, visit him when he was sick, and comfort him when he was cast in prison. They say, "But when did we see you hungry or thirsty or lonely or naked or sick?"

He replies, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these [my brothers], you did not do for me" (v. 45). On the other

hand, he welcomes those who did these things for his brethren.

Each of these parables, though quite different from the others in detail, is nevertheless one with them in its essential features. In each case, there is a sudden return of the Lord which demands an accounting. In each case, there are some who are prepared for his coming and others who are not. In each case, there are rewards and judgments. Most remarkable of all, in each case those who are lost are totally amazed at the outcome. The foolish virgins are astounded that the bridegroom will not open the door to them. The wicked and lazy servant clearly expected the master to be pleased with his zero-growth performance. The goats cannot believe that they have actually rejected Jesus. They say, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?" (Matt. 25:44). They are overwhelmed as he sends them away unto "eternal punishment" (v. 46).

Thus it will be with our generation. We have more opportunities to learn about Christ in our day than ever before in human history. Books and magazines and radio programs and movies and television have all told about him. The call has gone forth, "Behold the man! Look to this one for salvation. He loves you, he died for you. He rose again. Turn from your sin and place your trust in him as your Savior!" But many go blithely on and will be overwhelmed in the day of God's reckoning.

Behold the King

Today is the day of God's grace. And the wisdom of the just in this day consists, as Paul expressed it, in knowing nothing among men save "Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). Now we see him offered to us for salvation. His death is our life. But the day is coming when this period of grace will end, and the One who was judged by the tribunals of this world will be Judge.

One author writes, "How long may it be before we hear the sound of another '*Ecce homo*!'? But if we then lift up our eyes, a different form will present itself to our view than that which we saw on Gabbatha. The King of Glory will then have exchanged the robe of mockery for the

starry mantle of divine Majesty, the wreath of thorns for a crown of glory, and the reed for the scepter of universal dominion." What will it be in that day? Will it be judgment? Or will the rod be extended as a symbol of his gracious favor as he declares, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). The answer depends on how you behold him now and whether you will surrender to him as your Lord.

Chapter 239.
Who Died on Calvary?

John 19:6-7

The events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth are moving ahead quickly in the nineteenth chapter of John, and before long the teacher of Israel will be crucified. Who is he? Who is this One soon to give his life on Calvary? This question is important because the value of his death depends entirely upon who he was. If he was a criminal and deserved to die, his death means nothing, at least no more than the death of any one of the thousands of other criminals who have been executed down through the long centuries of human history. If he was an innocent man, his death speaks to us merely of the miscarriage of justice; his deportment, only of how a strong man can bravely bear misfortune. On the other hand, if he was God, as he claimed to be, his death has monumental significance.

The Central Issue

We see how inescapable the question is in the verses to which we come now, for although the real charge against Jesus had been veiled in the Jews' previous dealings with Pilate, it now bursts forth in a flood of sudden fury. No less than six separate charges had been brought against him. First, he had been charged with threatening to destroy the Jewish temple (Matt. 26:61). Second, he was accused of being an evildoer

(John 18:30). Third, he was charged with perverting the nation (Luke 23:2). Fourth, it was said that he had forbidden Jews to pay taxes to Caesar (Luke 23:2). Fifth, he was said to have stirred up the people (Luke 23:5). Sixth, he was cited for having made himself a king (Luke 23:2). Here were six serious accusations. But these charges were not the real reason for the hatred of the Jewish leaders for Jesus or their prosecution of the case against him before Pilate. The real accusation is that he had claimed to be the unique Son of God, which they judged blasphemy. The seventh and central charge bursts forth now.

It had been there from the beginning, of course. The very first accusation against Jesus was that he had claimed he was "able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days" (Matt. 26:61). On the surface this seemed to be only the irrational ravings of a madman. But Christ was not mad, and the leaders of Israel undoubtedly read into his words precisely what he intended. What he was actually saying was that he was God and that, although he would permit the leaders of the nation to kill him, he would rise again in three days. Only this explains the striking repetition of the phrase "in three days" in each of the four Gospels and the later concern of the leaders to seal and guard Christ's tomb (Matt. 27:62-64).

Why were the other charges raised then? They were raised in the Jewish court because, at first, the leaders of the Sanhedrin were unable to secure adequate evidence to convict Jesus of the charge of blasphemy. They were raised in the Roman court because the enemies of the Lord rightly believed that Pilate would never consent to convict Christ on the religious question. Before Pilate, Jesus had to be accused of being an insurrectionist and thus a threat to Caesar.

It was on the ground of insurrection that Pilate conducted the trial. Imagine his surprise then when, after having acquitted Jesus of the charge of insurrection, he suddenly hears the real charge mentioned. Pilate had said, "I find no basis for a charge against him" (John 19:6). Now his accusers reply, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, *because he claimed to be the Son of God"* (v. 7). Up to now Pilate had been conducting the trial as if Jesus were only a man and the

issues merely human issues. The crux of the matter was in Pilate's challenge to "Behold the *man*!" Now the ground is shifted entirely, and Pilate must face the entirely new question as to whether Jesus is actually the Son of God.

Was his claim to be the Son of God factual? I ask the question in this way because it is not only Pilate who is forced to face this question. You must confront it too.

The Witnesses Agree

Donald Grey Barnhouse preached a sermon in which he asked our question: "Who died at Calvary?" He pointed out in his sermon that the issue is not merely a matter of saying that the man who was killed was Jesus of Nazareth, because there is no question about that. The question is: Who was Jesus? Was he only a man? Or was he more? Was he God, as some suggested? Barnhouse called attention to this issue and then suggested that the various witnesses to this central issue be brought forward. One by one he called them to the bar and questioned them.

The most important witness to any fact is *God himself*. So, although there are many witnesses to be considered, we rightly begin here. Does God Almighty bear witness to Christ's deity?

Here we forego the numerous Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah and the question of whether, on the basis of his words and deeds, Jesus may be declared to be that One. Instead we turn to the testimony of God rendered during the days of Christ's earthly ministry. We turn to the moment of Christ's baptism. Here we see the Holy Spirit of God descending upon the Lord Jesus Christ, like a dove from heaven. We hear God speak. He says, 'This is my Son, whom I love; in him I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Has such a testimony ever been rendered to another? We do not know of any. God called Abraham his friend, and David was called a man after God's own heart. But these were nevertheless still men. Here is one called God's Son. The testimony is weighty.

This was at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, before the temptation, the public acclaim, the rejection, the disappointments. What about later, after these things? Perhaps the one in whom God was "pleased" at the beginning will not be so pleasing at the end, after he has rubbed shoulders with the world. We turn to that moment toward the end of Christ's ministry when Jesus stood on the Mount of Transfiguration and was changed from his earthly into his heavenly appearance. In this moment he was clothed with light as with a garment, and in the hearing of Peter, James, and John, God Almighty spoke again from heaven, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; in him I am well pleased. Listen to him" (Matt. 17:5).

God the Father testifies to Christ's deity.

The second witness to be summoned is *Jesus of Nazareth.* Any court should be willing to hear a man's testimony about himself. So we turn to Jesus and press our question on him: "Your name is Jesus of Nazareth?"

"Yes."

"What do you say for yourself?"

The Lord replies, "I have already given my testimony. On one occasion the leaders of Israel challenged me to give an accounting of myself, and I did this so clearly that they immediately took up stones to throw at me. I said, 'Before Abraham was born, I am' (John 8:58). On another occasion I taught the people in Solomon's porch and said to them, 'I and my Father are one' (John 10:30). Just this week in my final moments together with my disciples I answered a question raised by Philip, saying, 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9). Last night the high priest asked me the question, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' and I replied, 'I am; and you will see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven' (Mark 14:61-62). It is for this claim that I am being tried and for which I will be executed."

The testimonies of God Almighty and of Jesus of Nazareth agree.

We have heard the witness of two members of the Godhead. What about the third member, *the Holy Spirit?* Before he was crucified the Lord said of the Holy Spirit, "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me" (John 15:26). This he has done. The entire New Testament is the Spirit's witness to Christ's deity.

Are there other supernatural witnesses from whom we should hear?

There are *angels* of heaven. What do they say? We hear their voice in the events which surround the birth of the Lord in Bethlehem. Gabriel is one of them. He appeared to Mary before the birth saying, "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.... The holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:31-32, 35). Later in the story the angels appear to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem and say to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

What of the *demons?* They know the truth about Jesus even though they are opposed to his rule. What is their opinion of the One who now appears before Pilate? We remember that on one occasion the Lord healed a man who had been possessed by many demons. He was about to cast them out when they replied, "What do you want with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" (Matt. 8:29). On another occasion the demons fell down before him, saying, "You are the Son of God" (Mark 3:11).

The Human Witnesses

It is not only supernatural witnesses that attest to Christ's deity. There are also many human witnesses, among them those who knew him best. What of these? What of the writers of the Gospels? These men are the historians of Christ's life. They may rightly be supposed to have carefully investigated the things that were being told about him. Some

lived with him. They were eyewitnesses of the events they describe. What do these men think of the One who stands before Pilate?

"Matthew, what do you think? You wrote the first of our Gospels. You are a Jew, and the Jews confess one God. You are not likely to ascribe divinity to any man without overwhelming evidence."

Matthew replies, "I believe that Jesus is the divine Savior of whom the Old Testament speaks. I have said so. I said that his birth was in fulfillment of that great prophecy of Isaiah, which says, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel... God with us" (Matt. 1:23; cf. Isa. 7:14).

"Mark, what about you? You traveled with Peter. You received firsthand information from him.

What do you think?"

Mark answers that he introduced his Gospel with these words: "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1).

Luke was a physician. He was not inclined to flights of fancy or exaggeration. He has given us the most scientific of the four Gospels. Yet Luke favorably records some of the most exalted titles ever given to Jesus: "Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32), "Son of God" (1:35), and "Christ the Lord" (2:11).

What about *John*? "John, what is your testimony?"

John tells us that he has written the most explicit words of all. His Gospel starts, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (John 1:1-4). John's Gospel concludes, 'Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:30-31).

Are there other human witnesses?

Yes, there are. *John the Baptist*, who was a first cousin of Jesus, testified, "I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God" (John 1:34).

Martha, in whose home Jesus and his disciples often stayed, testified, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (John 11:27).

Jesus once asked the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" *Peter,* speaking for the rest, declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:15-16). Did Jesus recoil from that confession? If there was ever an opportunity in which he could have corrected this "mistaken" notion of who he was, it was then. He could have said, "You are wrong, Peter. I am not God's Son. I am just a man, as you are." But that is not what he said. Instead he replied, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah; for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). The earthly witnesses and the heavenly witnesses agree.

Those at the Cross

It is said that the way in which a man dies throws much light upon who he is and how he lived. It is of interest to know how Christ died and what those who witnessed his death thought of him in his dying moments.

Two who were present were thieves who died with him. One thief was hardened and railed against Jesus, according to Luke's testimony. He said, "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" *The other thief* replied, "Don't you fear God, since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly; for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." He then turned to Jesus and said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:39-42).

The *centurion* was in charge of the execution party. He is a sober man. He has seen many die. What do you think, centurion? Our soldier replies, "I saw it all. I witnessed the conduct of the prisoner in his

agony. No curse escaped his lips. I saw his immolation. While being nailed to the tree he even asked God to forgive those who were killing him, saying they did not know what they did. He suffered bravely, and as he died darkness covered the land, even at high noon. An earthquake came; the rocks were shaken and the graves opened. I saw these miracles. I said, 'Surely this was a righteous man. This was the Son of God'" (Luke 23:47; Matt. 27:54).

What Is Your Verdict?

At last we come to ourselves. We have not seen him in the days of his flesh, but he is proclaimed to us in Scripture and the Holy Spirit bears witness to him in countless Christian hearts. What do we say? Is he the Son of God? I give you *my testimony.* I look within my heart, and I confess that there is nothing within me to draw me to him. He is a thing apart. Left to myself I should find a lifetime of other pursuits to keep me busy. I could be as skeptical as Thomas or as hostile as the apostle Paul before his conversion. But Jesus spoke to me. He spoke through the Word of God, declaring who he is and what he has done. My heart went out to him, and I confess that he is indeed the Son of God and my Savior.

Is that *your testimony*? You know the evidence. Will you decide in favor of his claims? Or will you decide against him? The strange thing about this case is that the decision you make will not determine the destiny of the defendant. It will determine the destiny of yourself, the judge.

Chapter 240.
How God Views Human Government

John 19:8-11

There are times in the history of a nation when the government disappoints or even betrays its people and it becomes natural to ask why government exists and how it should function. In recent years we have

gone through such a period in the United States. First, there was the war in Vietnam. It was never popular. But as the years of fighting dragged on and the prospects for success increasingly dimmed, opposition mounted and many began to ask whether they could really participate in the armed forces or in war-related activity. Some protested vigorously, even leaving the country to avoid the draft. On the other hand, many people resented those whom they considered "deserters" and argued that the government has a right to wage war and must be obeyed and supported when it does so. Again, there was the Watergate crisis. In this debacle, the progressive revelations of corruption, even at the highest levels of government, made many cynical and fueled an already intense disdain for government or any other form of authority.

What were Christians saying during this period? It would be nice if we were able to point to a united "Christian voice" in these crises. Unfortunately this was not the case. In regard to
Vietnam, some were pacifists and some were in favor of fighting. Others were selective pacifists. That is, they were against this war but for some others. In the matter of Watergate, some were ready to pull down the system while others were hardly ready to admit that a breach of trust had occurred.

What is right? How should we view government, particularly in those times when its decisions are unpopular or when it obviously fails to conduct itself morally or do its job?

God or Caesar?

The standard answer to questions regarding a Christian's responsibility to government has always been the reply of the Lord Jesus Christ to his critics: "Give Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Matt. 22:21). The background for this valuable guideline was a question about taxes: "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" (v. 17). Christ's reply has therefore rightly been understood to give a binding, affirmative answer in that area. But what should be said beyond this? Does the Christian have duties toward the state in other areas? Are those duties independent of his Christian duties? Suppose the

commands of God and the commands of the government disagree? Do we obey Caesar, arguing that God has set him over us and will therefore take care of the consequences of our act? Or do we obey God? The issues are not easy to resolve. And to go back to the matter of taxes, we see that even this is not entirely clear. The question "Should we pay taxes if we know for sure that our tax money will be used for godless or immoral ends?" shows that there are puzzling dimensions in this area also.

It is probably true that there are always going to be gray spots in connection with this subject, if for no other reason than that it is never easy to see the situation clearly. But on the other hand, we do not need to be entirely without guidelines, for the Bible provides them in a number of places. Paul's discussion of authority in Romans 13 is one example. Another is the rather extended discussion between Pilate, the representative of human government, and the Lord Jesus Christ, the representative of divine government, on the occasion of the Lord's trial leading to his crucifixion.

This issue was always at the heart of the trial before Pilate, of course, for Jesus was accused of having made himself "a king" in opposition to the legitimate rule of Caesar; the issue was whether Jesus stood in a right or wrong relationship to Caesar's government. But in another sense, the question of the legitimacy of human government did not really emerge in the earlier stages of the trial because the examination of Jesus disclosed that his was a spiritual kingdom, which Pilate assumed (perhaps too quickly) was none of his affair. Now the situation changes. Pilate begins to interrogate Jesus again, demanding, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" (John 19:10).

The Lord replies, 'You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin" (John 19:11).

This statement does not merely separate the two spheres of authority, Caesar's and God's; it brings them into relationship to one another,

showing that the authority of government comes not from anything intrinsic to itself but from God. That is, it is a delegated authority. Consequently, there is always the matter of government responsibility and sin.

All Authority from God

Let us take these matters one at a time. First, there is Christ's statement that Pilate's power did not come from himself or, for that matter, even from Caesar but from God. This means that all power comes from God and is to that extent legitimated by him.

One word often translated by "power" is *dynamis*, which means "explosive power." We get our words "dynamite" and "dynamic" from it. It is used in such verses as Romans 1:16, which tells us that the gospel is the explosive "power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes." A second word frequently translated by "power" is *kratos*, which means the naked "power of rule." Though it can be legitimate, it can also be illegitimate, as in the case of the devil, whose "power of death" (Heb. 2:14) will some day be taken away by God. *Kratos* gives us the words "democracy," "plutocracy," "monocracy," and others. If Jesus had used either of these words in this sentence, he would have meant only that all power of rule comes from God, just as all life comes from him.

But Jesus did not use *dynamis* or *kratos* in his warning to Pilate. He used an even stronger word, *exousia*, which means "legitimate authority." Thus, he was saying not only that power in the sense of might comes from God but that human government is divinely authorized and therefore exercises a rule that must be recognized.

When we see this we begin to see, not merely that Jesus was acknowledging the power of Pilate as a bare fact or even pointing out that its source is to be found ultimately in God, but rather that God has legitimized human government and that it is therefore to function properly and be highly respected. He himself respected it, for he

courteously answered Pilate's questions and never once suggested that Pilate did not have authority to pronounce a judgment on him.

Pilate pronounced wrongly, as we know. But he had authority to make the pronouncement even if it was wrong. His authority was from God. Jesus did not suggest that it be wrested from him because he made even so great an error as condemning the Son of God. At the very least, then, we are taught here that revolution for the sake of revolution—that is, "I would rather be king than you, so I will try to unseat you"—is unchristian. Rather we are to honor, respect, and be thankful for those who are over us, as Paul suggests in Romans (13:1-7).

One other conclusion needs to be kept in mind: we are to be subject to the higher authorities. That is, Christians should be model citizens. Unfortunately, it is often the case that Christians disrespect authority—elected officials, policemen, and others—and this leads naturally to a light attitude in regard to obeying them. This ought not to be. Rather we should be scrupulous at this point. We should obey the speed limits and all other civil laws, pay our taxes honestly, and do as those who are in positions of authority instruct us. Calvin, who had a justified fear of anarchy because of the troubles of his own time and warned against it, wrote that obedience must be given even to wicked rulers: "We are not only subject to the authority of princes who perform their office toward us uprightly and faithfully as they ought, but also to the authority of all who, by whatever means, have got control of affairs, even though they perform not a whit of the princes' office."

Are There No Limits?

But are there no limits? Suppose the king is a *very* wicked king, or the president a *very* wicked president? Is a command from such a king legitimate or should a Christian disobey it? The answer is that there are indeed limits. Therefore, although we must be careful to render every possible measure of obedience to those in authority (usually much more than we would wish), we must still do nothing contrary to the express

commands of God in the Scriptures or to that standard of morality arising from them, even though a contrary act is commanded.

Here the second part of Christ's statement comes in, for after instructing Pilate in regard to the ultimate source of his authority, Jesus went on to speak of sin, saying, "Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin" (John 19:11). If it were only power (*dynamis* or *kratos*) that Pilate had been given, it would be impossible to speak of sin as intrinsic in the exercise of the power, just as it is impossible to speak of sin in the case of the cat that kills the mouse or the germ that kills another germ. But since it is "authority" that Pilate has been given, this is another matter entirely. For authority, being granted by another, necessarily involves responsibility to that other one, and responsibility if it is not properly exercised involves sin against him. In other words, authority enhances human government, but it also limits it, for it is an authority bound by the moral nature of the God from whom it comes.

One limit which the Bible places on obedience to human authority concerns the *preaching of the gospel.* This is a Christian duty based upon the explicit command of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20). What should happen when authorities demand differently is illustrated in the fourth and fifth chapters of Acts. The disciples had been preaching and doing miracles, and these had created such a stir that they were called before a council of elders in Jerusalem. The authorities examined the disciples, in this case Peter and John; and then, since the miracle they had done in healing a lame man was so evident and the rulers could not deny it, these settled upon the precedent of merely commanding the disciples to keep silence. We read, 'Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus."

Peter and John replied, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:18-20).

The apostles were threatened in connection with this command, but they went back to their preaching. When the authorities heard of it and learned that they were again back in the temple area teaching the

people, they sent guards to bring them before the council (peacefully this time), and they demanded, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

Peter spoke up for all the apostles, "We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him" (Acts 5:28-32). This enraged the Jewish rulers, and they would have killed the disciples had Gamaliel not intervened to counsel tolerance.

These stories indicate that Christians are to give precedence to the preaching of the gospel and are not to cease from it even though commanded to do so by the civil authorities. Of course, they must be willing to suffer the consequences of their persistence even though that should be imprisonment or death.

A second limit the Bible places on obedience to human authorities concerns *Christian conduct and morals.* No government has the right to command the Christian to perform an immoral or non-Christian act. We are reminded here of the Nazi era in Germany in which Christians living there were faced with a devilish state and its openly antichristian and even antihuman practices. During this period, German citizens were commanded to have no dealings with the Jews in that country. They were not to trade with them, help them, have friendships with them, or acknowledge them in any way. Such a policy was immoral. Thus, although many German Christians obeyed the government in this regard, they did not need to obey and should not have.

Some stood up against these monstrosities. One who did so was Martin Niemoeller who, for preaching the truth, was eventually thrown into prison. We are told that another minister then visited him in prison and argued that if he would only keep silent about certain subjects and

respect the government, he would be set free. "And so," he concluded, "why are you in jail?" "Why aren't *you* in jail?" Niemoeller answered.

Niemoeller's course was the right one, for by his silence the visiting minister was upholding a lie and indirectly encouraging an irresponsible and demonic regime. Similarly, in this country Christians must also speak out against racism, government and corporate corruption, discrimination, and other evils. Moreover, they must staunchly refuse to participate in them in any way even if they are commanded to do so by their government or by a business superior.

The Greater Sin

Yet we have a warning even here, for although the Lord Jesus exercised his right as the ultimate judge of the world to boldly point out Pilate's sin—it must have astonished him—he spoke at the same time of the sin of the "church" of his day and indicated that its sin was greater.

It is an interesting word: "greater." It suggests that Pilate's sin was great; he was sinning against his conscience (he knew Christ was innocent) and against his divinely given responsibility (he had pronounced Jesus innocent). It affirms that the sin of the religious leaders was greater; they were sinning out of hate-filled hearts and against their own law (which should have protected Jesus). It may imply that the sin of Judas was *greatest;* he was closest to Christ and therefore sinned against the background of the greatest knowledge. Taken together the parts of the comparison teach that the greatest danger lies, not with the state, but with those who are closest to spiritual things. Others may sin out of ignorance or neglect or cowardice. But religious people are inclined to sin out of arrogance or pride or actual hatred of God and God's truth—even when they think they are most moral.

Let us look to ourselves and to the truth of God which we profess. It is not enough to have the name of Christian. That in itself does not give us any superior insight into morality or any point of leverage from which to speak against or disobey the government which God has set up. We can only do that as we respond, painfully at times, to his own voice

which comes to us in Scripture, for then we are gripped, not by a lesser authority than that of the state (that is, our own), but by a greater, even the overriding and only infallible, authority of God.

Chapter 241.
Christ's Fate Sealed

John 19:12

It is not always easy to know when a Christian's obligation to obey God requires disobedience to the state. If God and state were always diametrically opposed, the decision would be easy. We would obey God and disobey the state in all situations. But this is not the case. The state is often if not usually right. And what is more, it has been instituted by God and is invested with God's authority. Consequently, under normal circumstances we are to obey the government even when those who form it seem unjust. Yet what are "normal circumstances"? We are not to obey without question. How then do we decide when a particular demand by the state is wrong and requires firm Christian rebuke and opposition? We began to deal with this question in the previous study by showing that the authority of the state is limited in at least two important areas. First, it has no right to forbid the proclamation of the gospel. If it does, we must resist, knowing that we have been given a commission to preach the gospel from Jesus himself. Second, the state has no right to command an immoral act.

But it is right here that further problems develop; for if we know our hearts, we know that it is extremely easy to consider the state hopelessly immoral, simply because it is doing something we do not like—because we are arrested for speeding, for example, or because we are taxed more than we think reasonable—and therefore resist it unjustly. Or again, we may attempt to throw off its authority, not because that authority is being exercised tyranically or in clear opposition to the commandments of God, but simply because we do not

countenance the authority of any other human being. We saw that Jesus alerted us to precisely this danger in John 19:11 by indicating that, although the sin of Pilate was great, the sin of the religious leaders was greater in that they sinned out of pride and against a greater knowledge. It seems from this comparison that the closer we are to spiritual things, the greater the danger of acting from impure motives becomes.

So what do we do? We are helped here by the unfolding of the story of Christ's appearance before Pilate, for Pilate, by contrast, shows what we should do.

Fear of Caesar

Pilate did not want to condemn Jesus; of that we are certain. That he did not want to see him executed is a bit puzzling, for he was not intrinsically strong on justice and certainly did not have any high regard for the Jews or Jewish prisoners. However, he was certainly trying to get Christ off, whatever his reasons may have been. First, he pronounced him innocent. Then, when he met with violent and almost revolutionary opposition to that decision, he tried a series of expedients: sending him to Herod, suggesting his release rather than the release of Barabbas, causing him to be beaten and then produced suddenly to evoke sympathy from the cruel mob. After these things, even after Jesus' pointed rebuke to Pilate's arrogance in verses 10 and 11, Pilate tried again to release him, for the text says, "From then on, Pilate tried to set him free, but the Jews kept shouting, 'If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar'" (v. 12).

If Pilate was as unwilling to pass the death sentence as this verse and the other incidents show, how is it that he was eventually prevailed upon to do so? The verse gives the answer. The Jews, perceiving that Pilate could not be made to do their will save but by the strongest measures, implied that if he did not condemn one whom they considered to be a traitor, they would denounce Pilate to Caesar; and Pilate, who feared this more than anything else, complied.

Pilate is seen here in his most contemptible stance, and yet he is also most pitiable. Pilate was the governor. He spoke for Caesar and had the legions of Caesar at his call to enforce all his bidding. Yet this one who should have been above fear is riddled by it and thus made weak-kneed in the greatest moral encounter of his career. Of what was the governor afraid? He was afraid of three things. First, he was afraid of *Christ.* We see this in verse 8; for we are told that after Pilate had heard that Jesus made himself out to be the Son of God, "he was even more afraid" and determined anew to release him. This was certainly not the kind of holy reverence for Christ that a true follower of the Lord might have, but it was a true fear. Pilate thought that Jesus might actually be more than a man, perhaps one of the half-human, half-divine gods of Greek and Roman antiquity, and so move fate against him if he judged unfairly.

Second, Pilate was afraid of the *people.* He did not like them, of course. His many dealings with the Jews showed his consummate disdain and even hatred for them. Yet he knew their power and feared to have them united against him. If he had not feared the people, he would have released Jesus quickly and would have shown no concern for pacifying them.

Third, and most significant, Pilate feared *Caesar.* And with cause! The suspicious nature of Caesar Tiberius was well known, and Pilate had already had other confrontations with the Jews which had worked to his disfavor before the emperor. What if Caesar should disapprove of his handling of this matter? What if the leaders of this people should send another delegation to Caesar saying that Pilate had refused to deal forcefully with one who was guilty of high treason? If Pilate had possessed a clean record, he could perhaps have overlooked a threat based on such false charges. But his record was not clean; and it was quite possible that Pilate would lose his position and even his very life if such an accusation were made. Indeed, we know that years later Pilate was removed from office by the Proconsul of Syria and banished to France where he later died.

Pilate's failure suggests the answer to the questions raised earlier. Pilate feared man!

Consequently, he was unable to do the just thing and even fell so low as to pronounce sentence on the very Son of God. We will do better only when we fear God over man and act justly regardless of the consequences.

God Is Sovereign

But we need to spell this out a bit further. What specifically does it mean to fear God more than man? And how can we personally be brought to the place where we do so? There are three requirements.

First, we must have it fixed in our minds that God is truly sovereign in human affairs. We know this because the Scriptures teach it. But in addition to knowing it, we must also have it planted in our minds so firmly that we can actually trust God when the crunch comes. Daniel was one who was able to do this. As we read his prophecy we realize that he was familiar with the concept of the sovereignty of God, for he witnessed the rise and fall of several great empires and was told in visions that it was God himself who was doing this. We think, for instance, of that great vision of the statue whose head was of gold, whose breast and arms were of silver, whose stomach and thighs were of bronze, whose legs were of iron, and whose feet were iron mixed with clay. Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed of this statue but had forgotten his dream. He demanded that his astrologers and sorcerers tell him its meaning, but they were unable to do this since they did not even know what the dream was. At last he sent for Daniel. Daniel asked for time, and that night God revealed to him Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation. Daniel then interpreted the dream to Nebuchadnezzar, showing it to be a prophecy of four succeeding world empires, the last of which was to be overturned by the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Daniel obviously knew God's sovereignty in the matter of the setting up and taking down of kings. But it was not only intellectually that Daniel knew this. He knew it experientially too and therefore was not afraid to stand by his convictions.

Darius, who succeeded Nebuchadnezzar's son Belshazzar, was a kind man and a friend of Daniel. But he was tricked into signing a law according to which no one was to ask a petition of any god or man for the period of thirty days, except King Darius. When Darius signed the law he was not thinking of Daniel. But soon word was brought that Daniel was continuing his practice of prayer to the God of Israel three times daily. Daniel was caught, and the king was caught too, for he had signed the order according to the law of the Medes and Persians which could not be altered. Daniel was thrown into a den of starving lions, the penalty for violating the emperor's decree.

We know that God delivered Daniel from the lions, just as he had earlier delivered his three companions from the burning fiery furnace. But the fact that God would deliver him and the others was not known to Daniel and his friends at the time the moral stances were taken. What gave these men the ability to do this, particularly when so many plausible arguments might have been raised in favor of compliance?

The answer is found in Daniel's personal knowledge of the truth of God's sovereignty. God was in control. Consequently, God was able to and certainly would accomplish what he had chosen to accomplish in these situations. Here is the way the friends of Daniel put it when called before Nebuchadnezzar on the occasion of their refusal to worship the statue on the plain of Dura. They said, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Dan. 3:16-18).

These men were able to resist the unjust demands of the powerful rulers of their day because they trusted an even more powerful ruler. Moreover, they were determined that in the ultimate analysis he (and not they) would control their lives.

Informed by Scripture

A second requirement for responsible action in the area of God and government, is that we must be thoroughly informed by Scripture. To want to do the right thing is not enough. We must know what the right thing is, and there is no way to know that apart from God's specific revelation of his standards in the Bible. We admit as we say this that even then there are areas that are ambiguous. The matter of fighting in wartime is one. Christians have been divided at this point, often with the best of intentions. Answers in the areas of abortion, artificial prolongation of life, legal defense of criminals, covert government activities, and others are not always as apparent as we might wish they were. But without the Bible there are no sure answers at all! Consequently, there is no substitute (even for the busiest of Christians) for studying the Bible and conscientiously striving to submit one's own thoughts to it.

Some would suggest that we must trust in conscience. But conscience is an unsure guide. At best, conscience tells us that we should do right when we know the right. But it does not know what is right unless the light of God's revelation shines upon it. One writer compares conscience to a sundial, which is made for the sun just as conscience is made for God's revelation. In the light of the sun a sundial may give pretty good time. But suppose it is consulted by moonlight. By moonlight it may indicate that it is ten o'clock when actually it is three in the morning. Again, by using a candle or a flashlight the sundial may be made to tell any hour one desires. It is reliable only when the light of the sun shines upon it. In the same way, the conscience is useful only when the light of God shines on the human soul from the pages of God's Book, the Bible.

We need this book, and we need to grow in our understanding of it. If we do grow in our understanding, God will increasingly show his way to us, pointing out our sin and that of our society and quickening our will to do what is right before him.

Self-Surrender

One more thing is needed if we are to know what is right and actually do it, even when confronted by a contrary claim by our government or some other strong social pressure. What we need is to be willing to surrender everything. It is possible to have followed the first two steps suggested—to trust in God's sovereignty in human affairs and to study the Bible to such a degree that we know what is right—and yet fail at the crucial moment simply because the proper course is too costly.

This is what was wrong with Pilate after all. We cannot say that Pilate really believed in the sovereignty of God, but he had something like it. He believed in the power of the gods or else in some form of ultimate retribution. Otherwise he would not have been afraid when told that Jesus claimed to be God's Son. In the same way, we cannot say that he knew the moral standards of the true God as revealed in the Bible, because he had undoubtedly never read the Bible. Still he knew what was right in this situation, yet went against it. Why? If it was not from a fear of God and not from a failure to know what was right, it can have been only from the fear he would lose his position. It was this above all else that he valued. Pilate had to choose between what was right and what the world wanted. When the issue was clearly defined, he did not hesitate to choose the world and its rewards.

I think in contrast of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the Russian writer who was unjustly confined in the Soviet Union's notorious prison system for eleven years and lived to tell about it in *The Gulag Archipelago.* He saw suffering such as few free people have ever seen. He saw the dehumanizing practice of the Soviet guards and the equally dehumanizing practices of some of the prisoners. He saw some break and others grow strong. He asks, "So what is the answer? How can you stand your ground when you are weak and sensitive to pain, when people you love are still alive, when you are unprepared? What do you need to make you stronger than the interrogator and the whole trap?"

Solzhenitsyn answers, "From the moment you go to prison you must put your cozy past firmly behind you. At the very threshold, you must say to yourself: 'My life is over, a little early to be sure, but there's nothing to be done about it. I shall never return to freedom. I am condemned to

die—now or a little later. But later on, in truth, it will be even harder, and so the sooner the better. I no longer have any property whatsoever. For me those I love have died, and for them I have died. From today on, my body is useless and alien to me. Only my spirit and my conscience remain precious to me.' "Confronted by such a prisoner, the interrogation will tremble.

"Only the man who has renounced everything can win that victory."

Pilate failed to do the right, not because he did not know what was right—he did—but because he feared to have it suggested that he was not Caesar's friend. What irony! He wanted so much to be a friend of Caesar. But he was not Caesar's friend; he barely knew Caesar. And what is even more significant, Caesar was not *his* friend at all.

Pilate had no friends anywhere, and yet there stood before him One who, although he was God Almighty and the King of kings, nevertheless stooped to be the friend of sinners. Is he your friend? If not, may I commend him to you? He is a King! He will demand your total allegiance and faithful service, perhaps even to death. But he does not demand of you what he was unwilling to undergo himself. He died for you, and he promises that no matter what you may go through for his sake and the sake of righteousness, he will go through it with you, thereby proving himself to be "a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

Chapter 242.
No King but Caesar

John 19:13-15

There is probably no point in the entire life of the Lord where the sovereignty of God is more evident than in the final minutes of his trial before Pilate. Pilate was convinced that Jesus was innocent. He had said so (John 18:38; 19:4, 6). He wished to release Jesus and actually set

about to get him released. Yet, in spite of his personal convictions, will, and efforts, Christ was crucified. Why? The answer is that God had decreed from all eternity that Pilate should sentence Christ to death, and therefore not all the powers of earth and hell combined could thwart it.

This does not absolve Pilate from responsibility, as we have seen. He was to blame. Yet it does cause us to see beyond the evils of the human court to the blessed purposes of God the Father in Christ's sacrifice.

A Crucial Moment

The sovereign presence of God in this crucial moment was undoubtedly clear to John, for he has marked the point by time references, the first specific references to day and time since the start of chapter 13. Up to this point there has been much movement and uncertainty. There have been various trips by Jesus, followed by the various movements of the arresting party. There was the trial before the Jewish court (in three parts) followed by the trial before the Roman court (again in three parts). Now this comes to an end, and Pilate takes his place to render final judgment. John says, "When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour" (John 19:13-14).

This last sentence—"It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour"—is intended to mark this historic moment by citing both the day and hour. Yet at both points it has been a puzzle for serious scholars.

The problem with the reference to the day is this. The phrase "the day of Preparation of Passover Week" most naturally designates the period immediately preceding the Passover meal, when the preparations for it (including the killing of the Passover lamb) were being made. John is saying that Jesus was crucified on the morning of the day the Passover feast began. By the most common dating of the crucifixion this would be Friday morning. By my dating, explained in detail earlier in these volumes, it would be Thursday morning after a trial beginning

Wednesday night. However, in either case (whether on Thursday or Friday), John's description of the crucifixion as before or at the very time of the Passover seems to conflict with Matthew, Mark, and Luke's description of the Last Supper as a Passover meal. This is a problem because Jesus clearly cannot have eaten the Passover meal on the Passover and have been crucified on that same Passover day.

What is the solution? A number of very good explanations have been offered, and it is perhaps impossible to decide finally on any one. Leon Morris, who offers a very helpful discussion of the options, feels that the apparent discrepancy is due to the existence of two different calendars at the time of Christ. In this view Jesus observed the Passover on one day in accord with one calendar, the calendar apparently followed by the sect that wrote and preserved the Dead Sea Scrolls, and was crucified prior to the official Passover observed on a different day by mainstream Judaism.

My belief is that John is correct in showing that Jesus was crucified before the official beginning of the Passover, that is, at a time when the Passover lambs were being killed in preparation for it, and that the other Gospels refer to a meal with Passover characteristics but actually held one day earlier. We notice, for example, that none of the accounts mention the characteristic foods of Passover, namely, the Passover lamb and bitter herbs. Again, we note the concern of the Jewish leaders to effect the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus before the sacred days of Passover week began.

According to my understanding, the Last Supper was eaten on Wednesday night, April 5, A.D. 30, and the crucifixion took place the next morning, April 6 by our reckoning.

Here we come to the second problem. John speaks of the moment at which Pilate gave his final verdict as "the sixth hour," while the Synoptics apparently fix it earlier, Mark in particular saying that it was "the third hour" when they crucified him (Mark 15:25). In ancient times hours were usually reckoned from sunrise. So John would be saying that Jesus was condemned around noon, that is, about six hours after a

6:00 A.M. sunrise; and Mark would be saying that he had been condemned and was actually on the cross by 9:00 A.M.

One attempt to solve this difficulty is to suggest that John is reckoning time by Roman rather than Jewish standards, according to which, so it is said, time was computed as we compute it, that is, from midnight. If this is so, John's reference is to 6:00 A.M. rather than noon. But does this really solve the difficulty? It is questionable, in the first place, whether the Romans actually reckoned time in this way. Morris and others believe that they did so only in legal documents. But even if they did and even if John is adopting their system, there is still a difference between John and Mark of three hours. Moreover, it is then difficult to see how the many events recorded by the various Gospels could be packed into so short a time span. Assuming that the Sanhedrin began their official trial at dawn (or even slightly before dawn), it is still necessary to have time for the presentation of Jesus before Pilate, the sending of Jesus to Herod and Herod's mocking of him, the second appearance before Pilate, the discussion and choice regarding Barabbas, the scourging, and then a final interrogation by Pilate. Could this all have taken place by 6:00 A.M. or even before 9:00 A.M.? It is doubtful. Rather we shall probably be closer to the truth if we imagine the greater part of the morning to be filled with such things.

Does this mean that Mark is wrong then? Not necessarily. In the first place, we need to recognize that no one in antiquity had watches and therefore that time was always reckoned in the most general categories. Second, the day as a whole was divided, like the night, into four portions of three hours each. The nighttime periods were designated as the four watches. The daytime periods were referred to generally by the first hour of each period: the first hour, the third hour, the sixth hour, and the ninth hour. This explains why the New Testament mentions almost no hour except the third, sixth, and ninth, and why the expressions "nearly" or "about" are so frequent. Bearing these facts in mind, we may say that Mark and the other synoptic Gospels indicate that Jesus was crucified during that period of the day designated as "the third hour," between the hours of 9:00 A.M. and noon, while John, who

says "about the sixth hour," indicates that it was in fact getting on toward midday when the trial before Pilate was completed.

Repeating History

Having placed the moment of the official verdict to his own satisfaction, John immediately goes to the overriding issue. Jesus had been accused of having made himself a king. So Pilate now asks, "Shall I crucify your king?" The question is fraught with irony. There is irony on Pilate's side, for his question is meant to be contemptuous—who else but a beaten, itinerant preacher would be *a Jewish* king? But John, on his part, also records the words with irony, for this One actually is the King of Israel.

John then records that the chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

Nothing could be more ludicrous on the lips of the priests of Israel than this protestation. It means, "We are loyal to Caesar and to Caesar alone." But actually they hated Caesar and maintained that only God was their king. Why would they say such a thing? One would think they would have choked on it as they said it. Yet so great was their hatred of Jesus that they would rather deny their own convictions than see him escape crucifixion. Still, the leaders of Israel spoke truer than they knew. They thought that they were loyal to God and hated Caesar. But it was the Son of God, God incarnate, whom they were rejecting; so they are actually showing that indeed they do not honor God and instead choose Caesar.

Something similar had occurred early in Israel's history. The government then was a theocracy; that is, Israel was ruled by God directly through spokesmen and spokeswomen, such as Moses, the many judges, and prophetlike figures such as Samuel. This was God's design. It was good for Israel. However, the day came when, as Samuel grew old, the people looked at the nations around them and felt cheated because these had kings and they did not. They therefore came to Samuel and said, "Give us a king to lead us" (1 Sam. 8:6).

We are told that the request displeased Samuel and the Lord as well. However, when Samuel asked God what he should do the Lord replied, "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king" (v. 7).

Someone has said that human beings never learn anything from history except that they never learn anything from history. That is true in this case, for apparently nothing was learned from this earlier rejection of Jehovah's rightful and blessed rule. Earlier they had rejected Jehovah. Now they reject Jehovah's Son, in consequence of which they have since been "many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones" (Hosea 3:4). It is a sad report, but it is a true report concerning Israel.

A Human Report

Yet it is not a Jewish report alone, for the rejection of God and Jesus is not a Jewish verdict alone. It is the verdict of the human race. What else does the fall of man mean if it is not the willful rejection of God's rule? It means, "We will not abide by his restrictions." What does the crucifixion of Jesus mean (both by Jewish and gentile hands) if it does not mean, "We will not have this man to rule over us"?

Do we doubt that this includes the Gentiles as well as the Jews? If so, we need turn only to the second psalm to see that view devastated. In that psalm the writer is viewing, not the rebellion of one man and one woman against God, not the rebellion of a few Jewish leaders and one gentile ruler against Jesus, but rather the collective rejection of the Creator by the united political kingdoms of this world. The psalmist asks, "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. 'Let us break their chains,' they say, 'and throw off their fetters'" (2:13). The Lord is Jehovah. His anointed is Christ. So we are confronted in these verses with what R. C. Sproul calls "a massive conspiracy to overthrow the authority of God and His Anointed One."

Sproul continues by asking, "Why the hostility? Why do the kings rattle their swords in belligerence? The answer is obvious: they despise the rule of God which restricts their freedom. Again the goal is autonomy. The rule of God is regarded as ropes and chains binding them and keeping them from unbridled pursuance of their desire. So the secret weapons are unveiled, the battleships come out of dry dock, the nuclear stockpile is tapped, and the troops are mobilized as the whole world joins the cosmic-liberation movement. With the infantile resolve of the child who seeks to quench a blazing fire with a straw, the rulers set themselves against the sovereignty of God."

What is God's answer? The response is not panic. It is not a flurry of preparation to resist the impending invasion of his rights. Instead we read, "The One enthrones in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath" (2:4-5). The verses show that the Lord is temporarily amused by this insanity. But the laughter quickly gives way as he moves to enthrone his Son and unleash his final judgments.

A Nation under God

This brings us to the final lessons of this section. We remember in view of the references to a king and Caesar that this entire section has been dealing with the relationship between God and human rulers. We remember that God is over all and that the authority of the state, while a legitimate authority, is nonetheless subject to him. But here is a progression. In the words of the Lord we have the proper picture: God and Caesar, with God in the dominant position. In the reaction of Pilate to the threat of the Jews ("If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar") we have a warped position: God and Caesar, but Caesar in the dominant position. In these verses, with which the issue of God and state is closed, we have the worst stance of all. Now it is no longer God and Caesar, in whatever relationship. It is Caesar alone. God is forced out of the picture entirely. Nothing is worse than this. Tyranny is not worse, for even under the worst of tyrants, if God is in the picture, he can at least be appealed to for help and the injustices may be corrected.

Without God, what is there? Nothing but the rapacious lust and cruel arrogance of human beings.

We may be more specific. Without God in the picture, there is no check on Caesar. We need a check. In America we recognize this secularly, for we have developed a system of checks and balances according to which one branch of government has control on another. Thus, the Congress makes laws that govern all citizens, but the judicial branch can declare them unconstitutional. Again, the president appoints Supreme Court judges, but Congress has the authority to impeach the president. Again, the President may initiate programs, but Congress must fund them. We recognize the need of checks and balances on the secular level because we know by experience that people in positions of power are untrustworthy. But if this is true on the merely human level, how much more true is it on the cosmic level. The united voices of the rulers of even so great a land as ours cannot be ultimate. God is ultimate. So if we forsake God, we are at the mercy of our governors.

Second, without God in the picture, we have no sure means of guiding government properly. This is not the same thing as a need for checks on our rulers. We need checks to keep government from becoming a law unto itself and therefore abusing and tyrannizing the governed. But suppose the government is not tyrannous. Suppose it operates well, as our government generally does. Even then it needs God, for it is only from God that we can receive a system of morality and a wisdom beyond our own. Only this is able to lead us upward to the fullness of those domestic blessings that God has for a people who sincerely seek his face.

There is an attempt in America today to remove every possible vestige of religion from national life. Will God be our God nationally? Or will we force him from national life? We can do either. We can have "no God but Caesar." But God help us if that happens! And God save us from it for Jesus' sake.

Chapter 243.
The Story of Two Thieves

John 19:16-18

The trial of Jesus began with the arrest in Gethsemane late in the evening of what we would call
April 5, A.D. 30, and ended with his crucifixion on Golgotha the next day, April 6. According to Jewish reckoning, this was all done on the fourteenth of the month of Nisan. The trial was a double trial, as we have seen in our studies of it. There was a Jewish trial and a Roman trial. In the Jewish trial, Jesus was examined on the charge of blasphemy. We have seen that if Jesus were merely a man, this charge and the condemnation that followed it were just, for Jesus had made this claim. In reality, however, the trial was unjust; for the laws of Judaism were repeatedly violated, and no defense in support of Jesus' claim was admitted. In the Roman trial, Jesus was examined on the charge of insurrection and treason, for having made himself "a king." This trial, in contrast to the Jewish trial, was legally exact. But the result was murder, for having acquitted the prisoner of all guilt, Pilate nevertheless gave Jesus over to be crucified.

So much for human justice. Now we are to see the justice of God unfold in his punishment of sin in Christ, so that on the basis of the death of the innocent Christ divine love might go out to embrace and fully save the one who trusts him.

The Crucifixion

We do not want to dwell on the crucifixion itself, for John does not do so and neither do the other Gospel writers. We need only note that there was no more terrible death than crucifixion.

William Barclay, late author of the popular "Daily Study Bible" series, states the matter clearly.

"Even the Romans themselves regarded it with a shudder of horror. Cicero declared that it was 'the most cruel and horrifying death.' Tacitus said that it was a 'despicable death.' Crucifixion was originally a Persian method of execution. It may have been used because, to the Persians, the earth was sacred, and they wished to avoid defiling it with the body of a criminal and an evildoer; so they nailed him to a cross and left him to die there, and then left the vultures and the carrion crows to complete the work. The Carthaginians took over crucifixion from the Persians; and the Romans learned it from the Carthaginians. Crucifixion was never used as a method of execution in Italy; it was only used in the provinces, and there only in the case of slaves. It was unthinkable that a Roman citizen should die by such a death. Cicero says: 'It is a crime for a Roman citizen to be bound; it is a worse crime for him to be beaten; it is well nigh parricide for him to be killed; what am I to say if he be killed on a cross? A nefarious action such as that is incapable of description by any word, for there is none fit to describe it.' It was that death, the most dreaded death in the ancient world, the death of slaves and criminals, that Jesus died."

The method of crucifixion is detailed in the New Testament and in other ancient documents. After sentence was passed, the victim was first subjected to scourging, a punishment so severe that some died under it. In Jesus' case the scourging took place before the final passing of sentence so as to evoke pity from the mob. Next the horizontal bar of the cross was bound to the condemned man's back. He was then led through the city to the place of crucifixion accompanied by a centurion and four soldiers who made up the execution party. A placard describing the crime for which he was to die was carried before him.

Arriving at the place of crucifixion, the victim was stripped of his clothes, which became the property of the soldiers. The crossbar was then hoisted upward to rest upon the upright bar which had already been prepared to receive it. The victim's hands were nailed in place. In most cases the feet were also nailed or bound to the cross. As a result of this he could raise himself up from time to time, thereby alleviating the strain upon his arms and diaphragm. After hours or even days of such

torture, the victim would die of shock, exposure, loss of blood, or suffocation.

Three Died on Calvary

It is interesting that as John tells the story of Christ's crucifixion he does so with great restraint, not at all emphasizing the physical aspects of the crucifixion. One reason for this is that the physical aspects were well known to his contemporaries and so needed little elaboration. But the more important reason is that John (like the other Gospel writers) has more important things to emphasize. There is the fulfillment of prophecy, for example. There are the words from the cross. One striking point, significantly mentioned in all four Gospels, is that Jesus was not the only one to die that day. He was accompanied in his death by two thieves.

Theirs is an interesting story, though John himself does not elaborate upon it. Apparently they had been guilty of robbery, which may have been part of a wider revolutionary activity on their part. The word used to describe them was also used of Barabbas (John 18:40), and it can also mean "an insurrectionist." Whatever their specific crime may have been they were caught and were now sentenced to die with Jesus. As he was nailed to the cross, they were also nailed. As he was lifted up, they were also lifted up. The pain was excruciating, and these two robbers, being filled with anguish and despair, must have cried out intensely cursing God, the Romans, the Jews, even their own fathers and the mothers who gave them birth.

But the Jews were not minding these robbers. They were thinking of Jesus, and they were adding insult upon insult to his sufferings. 'You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross if you are the Son of God" (Matt. 27:40). "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One" (Luke 23:35). "Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe" (Mark 15:32). As they listened to these taunts the thieves turned their thoughts from themselves to Jesus and joined in the jeering. Matthew tells us that

"the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him" (Matt. 27:44). Luke even gives the words of one: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (Luke 23:39).

Suddenly something wonderful happened, a miracle. God began to work in the heart of one thief so that his cursing died down, he fell to thinking, and at last began to understand the truth about himself and Jesus. Earlier he had been cursing. Now he turned to his companion and rebuked him for the evil things he now understood him to be speaking. "Don't you fear God, since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." He then turned to Jesus and voiced his new-found faith, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

What did Jesus answer? Did Jesus say, "It's too late for that now; you should have thought of that when you were joining that revolutionary band"? Did he say, "I appreciate your confidence, but I don't know; if we get through this, I'll see what I can do for you"? Did he say, "We're both in the same boat, mister; we just have to grit our teeth and bear it"? We know he did not. Instead he said in quiet confidence, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

In speaking to this thief, Jesus speaks to us too. For he not only shows the way to be saved; he also gives assurance of salvation.

A Sea Captain Is Saved

Donald Grey Barnhouse was working in his study at the church one day when the janitor came to him and said, 'There's a gentleman out here who wants to see you." He gave him the man's card, and Barnhouse saw that he was the British sea captain of the *Mauritania*, which was at that time the largest ocean liner crossing the Atlantic. Barnhouse took the card and went out to meet him.

The captain explained why he had come. "I'm captain of the *Mauritania*, as you can see from my card, and I go back and forth across the Atlantic about twenty-three times a year. Every other Sunday

on the way down the coast of Newfoundland I get your radio broadcast out of Boston.
Last Sunday, when I listened to you, I said to myself, 'I've got twenty-four hours when I land in New York. I'm going over to Philadelphia to see that preacher.' So I took the train this morning from New York and I just came down on the chance that I might see you."

Barnhouse said, "Sir, have you been born again?"

He said, "That's why I came down to see you."

By this time Barnhouse and the captain had reached the prayer-meeting room, where there was a blackboard. So Barnhouse took a piece of chalk and drew three crosses. "Let me put it very simply for you," he said. "You know that when Jesus Christ died on the cross there was a thief on either side?"

"Yes."

"And each was a sinner. He had sin *in* him." As he said this Barnhouse wrote the word "in" under both of the side crosses, representing those of the two thieves. Under the center cross he wrote, "not in!" "This man did not have sin in him. Christ was the spotless Lamb of God. Now," he continued, pointing to the first and third crosses, "in addition these men had sin *on* them." He wrote "on" over both crosses.

A puzzled expression came to the captain's face.

"Let me show you the difference between sin on you and sin in you," Barnhouse said. "Do you drive a car?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever gone through a red light?"

"Yes, I have."

"You were guilty, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"Did the police catch you?" Barnhouse asked.

"Well, no, they didn't."

"But you had that sin in you, didn't you?" Barnhouse continued. "And if the police had been there and had given you a ticket, then you would have had that sin on you as well. That's the difference between having sin in you and having sin on you. All of us have sin in us. We are all guilty. All of us also have sin on us. We are under God's judgment. This first thief had sin in him and sin on him. This second thief had sin in him and sin on him. They were exactly alike."

Barnhouse then wrote the word "on" over the cross of Christ. He said, "Christ also had sin *on* him. But he did not have sin *in* him. That sin which is on him is not his sin; it is my sin—and that of this thief." He then turned the chalk sideways and rubbed it through the word "on" over the cross of the believing thief and drew a big arrow pointing to the cross of Christ. "God justified this thief by putting all the guilt of his sin over here on Jesus Christ."

He went on to say, "Now, Christianity is simply this. Here is the perfect Christ who came and died on the cross. And here are two types of people, represented by these two thieves. Both are alike. Both have sin in them. Both have had sin on them. But in the one case, the sin that *was on* him is now *on Christ.* Sir, I am like this thief. My sin was on me, but now it is on Christ. You are either like this first thief or like this second thief. Sin is in you, in me, and it is either on yourself or it is on Christ. God says that Christ came to take away your sins. Which are you like?"

The captain was a tall, cultured man and evidently not one easily to give way to emotion. But he was greatly moved and was evidently trying to keep back tears. At last his hand moved forward, and he pointed to the cross of the repentant thief. He said, "By the grace of God, I am like this thief."

Barnhouse replied, "Your sin is on Christ. God says so."

He said, "God says so." Then he reached out and took Barnhouse's hand to say good-bye. "That's all I want," he added. "I can go back now." Instead Barnhouse asked him to stay, and they spent an hour or so talking about what he should do next in the Christian life.

Our Story

I tell that story at some length because the story of the believing thief, as told by Luke, and the story of the believing sea captain, as told by Barnhouse, is our story too if we have truly believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. If it is not your story, I pray that it might be before this study is finished.

The believing thief did three things. First, he recognized his own need, and by that I mean his spiritual need and not merely his physical one. On the physical side there were many things he needed. He needed deliverance, medical attention, drugs. Failing these things, he at least needed sympathy knowing that he was about to die. But this is not what he recognized and confessed so openly. What he recognized was that he was a sinner and that he needed a Savior. At other times in his life he might have tried to explain this need away. But here he recognized it. He confessed, "Don't you fear God, since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve."

Second, having recognized that he was a sinner and that he needed a Savior, he recognized that Jesus was that Savior. He may not have been able to explain the theology of justification, as I have just explained it. But he knew that Jesus was the innocent Son of God and the Savior. He showed this by saying, "This man has done nothing wrong" and by referring to the coming of

Christ in his "kingdom."

Finally, having recognized his need of a Savior and that Jesus was that Savior, he committed himself to him personally. He said, 'Jesus, remember *me* when you come into your kingdom." And the Lord did remember him. He remembered him on the spot, for he accepted him

right then and promised that on that very day, after each had died, they would be together in paradise.

If you would be like that thief—if you would have your sin on Christ rather than on yourself and therefore be able to receive the promise of being with Christ and God the Father eternally—you need to do what he did. First, admit your sin. Second, see Jesus as your Savior. Third, commit yourself to him personally. You need to say, "Lord, I know that I cannot get to heaven on my own record, for I am a sinner, and my record condemns me. I need you as my Savior, and I ask you to accept me as one for whom you died. Receive me. Remember me in the day of your judgment." If you will pray that prayer, you can be certain that Jesus has received you just as he received the repentant thief. From a human point of view everything was against him. Yet he called upon Jesus, and Jesus, in what was his last interview upon earth, heard him, received him, and promised him an entrance into paradise.

Will you call upon him? You can never be too sinful or call so late that Jesus will not hear. He is listening for that call now.

Chapter 244.
This World's King

John 19:19-22

Of the four Gospel writers, John alone (as far as we know from Scripture) was an eyewitness of Christ's crucifixion, so it is not surprising that his account contains details that are missing from the first three Gospels. He alone tells of how Jesus lovingly entrusted Mary to his care. He alone tells of two of Jesus' sayings from the cross: "I thirst" and "It is finished." No other but John tells us that in being crucified along with two thieves, Jesus was "in the midst." He alone tells that Christ's side was pierced by a soldier's spear and that there came forth blood and water. He alone distinctly tells us that Jesus set

out for Golgotha carrying his own cross, which afterward Simon of Cyrene had to carry, as the Synoptics tell us.

These details of the events of the crucifixion vary in importance, as John himself seems to indicate by the prominence or lack of prominence he gives them. Among those that are very important is a detail concerning the title that Pilate had placed over Christ's cross.

In Three Languages

There is nothing unusual in the mere fact that John mentions the title that was placed above the cross. This title was standard procedure in cases of crucifixion, and each of the other Gospel writers likewise mentions the placard. According to Matthew, "Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Matt. 27:37). Mark writes, "The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Mark 15:26). Luke puts it this way, 'There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Luke 23:38). Each of these accounts tells us that there was a placard designating the crime for which he was crucified, and each gives us the substance of it. What John tells us and the others do not is that it was written in three languages. John says, "Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek" (John 19:19-20).

This is an interesting detail. For one thing, it provided us with one explanation of why the precise wording of the title in each of the Gospels differs from that in the others. The difference is not great, of course. But the suggestion has been made that it is due to the evangelists having translated different versions of the title. Pink suggests that Matthew most likely translated the Hebrew, Luke the Greek, and Mark and John the Latin.

My own opinion is that this explanation, while possible, is unnecessary. It seems more likely that each writer simply gives a selected translation. The full text would have been: "This is [translated by Matthew and Luke] Jesus [given by Matthew and John], of Nazareth [added by John alone], the King of the Jews [provided by all four writers]."

John's intention in providing this detail is not, however, to explain to us how the wording of the other Gospels might have come to differ slightly. Rather it is to show that Jesus, while dying as a
Jewish King, nevertheless had a relationship to the world beyond Israel. Hebrew, Greek, and Latin were the major languages of the then known world. So John is actually declaring that Jesus is a King for everyone. He is not merely a Jewish Savior, though he is that. He is the Savior of the Greeks and of the Romans as well. He is the Savior of the world.

This World's Savior

Once we have seen this we immediately think of the strong emphasis on this truth throughout John's Gospel. We think, first, of John's prologue. "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (1:9-12). In these verses, from the very beginning of the Gospel, John is indicating that the provision for salvation from sin about which he is writing in the Gospel is not for the Jew only but instead is for all men and women. All have rejected Jesus. But from that vast number,

composed of both Jew and Gentile, God has elected a great mixed race to be his spiritual children.

Later on in this same chapter the ministry of John the Baptist is unfolded in detail, and John's testimony to Jesus is recorded. John declared, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29). The sacrifice of lambs, particularly at the Passover, was an exclusively Jewish institution. It would have been natural for John to have said, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of Israel." But this is not what John said. John recognized the universality of Christ's mission and so identified him as the world's sin-bearer.

The theme occurs again in John 3, the chapter that recounts Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus.
In these verses, Jesus speaks to Nicodemus of the nature and necessity of the new birth. Then John continues: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (3:16-17). After this he repeats the idea of Jesus being the world's light (vv. 19-21).

In chapter 4 we have an example of Jesus going beyond the strict bounds of Judaism to reach a woman from Samaria and, through her, her entire town. In this account there is an interesting contrast between Jesus' open and unprejudiced attitude toward others and the suspicion and vain superiority of his own disciples toward the Samaritan woman. They were practically on her own level of understanding and certainly on the same level when they stood before God. Yet the disciples looked down on her. Jesus, who was infinitely above them all, stooped to reach her and lift her up to believe on and eventually be with him. It is significant that the story goes on to tell of the witness of the woman to her friends and fellow citizens of Samaria, at the end of which these declare forcefully, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world" (4:42).

In chapter 6 he is the "bread of life" given for "the life of the world" (vv. 32-35, 48-51). In chapters 8 and 9 Jesus is "the light of the world" (8:12; 9:5). In chapter 10 he is the shepherd whose task is to gather his own out of Judaism and the other folds of this world. He is to lead them into that one new fold, which is the church (10:16).

In chapter 11 John reports the unwitting prophecy of Caiaphas, the high priest, who in calculating self-interest declared, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" (11:49-50). Caiaphas was not thinking of the Gentiles when he made this statement. In fact, he was not even thinking of Israel, though he claimed to be making his suggestion for the good of the Jewish people. Caiaphas was thinking of himself and of his own position and prestige. Yet, as John indicates, "He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one" (vv. 51-52).

In the next chapter John alone of the Gospel writers tells of the Greeks who came to Jesus and to whom Christ declared, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (12:20-23). At the end of the chapter, he reports Jesus as saying, "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness" (v. 46). It is difficult to imagine how the universal scope of Christ's death could be more fully or more consistendy presented.

Salvation for All

We should be glad that it is so presented, for it is John's way of saying that there is no respect of persons with God. Paul has written this truth theologically (cf. Rom. 2:11). But John
demonstrates it practically, showing that God offers salvation to the Greek and Roman as well as to the Jew. He saves the thief on the cross as well as the centurion who commanded the execution party. He proclaims his grace to the high and low, the rich and poor, the

intellectual and ignoramus, and so on for whatever categories you or I may see fit to impose on the race.

Besides, if we stop to analyze it, we can see that this is the only path open to a God of perfect justice. Barnhouse has written on this point, "There can be but one just method of salvation, and that is the method which God has devised in the infinite bounty of his being, and has brought to us by the goodness of his heart and the sacrifice that flows from his loving kindness. God says to the human race in sum: I will not look at what you have been. It makes no difference how you may have sunken in sin or how you have walked according to your standards. I will not take account of the arrogance of your pride or of the filth of your wallowing. I will not look at what you call iniquity, nor will I look at what you call goodness. I will bring you all to the gate and count you all as equal. I will ask you to admit that your gradations of human efforts and human attainments must be discarded and that you come, one and all, as bankrupts. Just admit that though you may have everything that satisfies your neighbors you have nothing that satisfies me. Then, says God, I will do everything for you and put righteousness to your account as a free gift without respect of persons."

What God has done may be remembered in this fashion. We are studying the significance of the placard that Pilate caused to be erected over Christ's cross, the placard that designated his supposed crime. But we may remember that according to the Scriptures God saw another title over that cross, though the message of that invisible placard was different.

Paul tells us about it in Colossians. He writes, "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:13-14). What is Paul getting at here? He is using the image of the placard placed over the cross of a dying criminal to say that although you and I have violated the holy law of God given at Sinai and therefore deserve to die for it, we do not need to die. For Jesus, the innocent One, took

our place and died for our trespass. His cross bore the placard of our crime. In him our violation of God's just law was punished, and God can therefore reach out to justify the one who trusts him, regardless of that person's nationality, intelligence, race, or any other factor.

Have you reached out to trust him? If you are pleading your attainments or heritage, you are not trusting him. You are trusting yourself, and you cannot come. It is only when you turn from these that you find the way open. The Greek and the Roman, the Jew and the Gentile are on the same ground. "The sinner and the saintling, the powerful and the powerless, the judge and the judged, the lawyer and the lawless, the noble and the nobody, the proprietor and the pauper, the doctor and the dunce, the strong and the stripling, the glamorous and the gawky, the sophisticate and the savage, the worthy and the worthless—all may be saved from whatever their supposed class background."

Lord of All

There is one more point. I have been writing about Jesus as the Savior of the world, for this is what John suggests by recording that the title placed over the cross was in the three main languages of the day. But I am sure you have noticed that the title did not actually refer to Jesus as the Savior. It actually referred to him as King—King of the Jews and of the remainder of the world as well. This suggests that his accomplishments as Savior and his identification as Lord go together. Or, to say it in other words, you cannot have Christ as Savior without having him as Lord also; he cannot be Lord unless he is Savior.

Is he your Lord? You say, "I think so, but what does that mean? What is he Lord of specifically?" I think there is an answer to that question in the significance of the languages in which the caption of the cross was written. The first language mentioned by John is Hebrew. Hebrew was the language of religion and morality. There were religions in Greece and Rome too, of course. But Hebrew was preeminently the language of religious faith, for it was in Hebrew that God had given the Old Testament, in which the only faithful representation of himself and the way of salvation was provided for the ancient world. Proclaiming Jesus

King in Hebrew suggests that he is King of religion. He is himself the only true representation of God and the only sure and certain proclaimer of the way to be just before him. Jesus is Lord in this area. Consequently, if he is your Lord, he must be the One who determines what you believe concerning God and salvation. You should not say, "I think so-and-so" if Jesus is truly your King. Rather, your question must be, "What does *he* think? What is *his* teaching?"

Greek is the second language. This was the language of science, culture, and philosophy. It was the language of beauty. If Jesus is Lord in this area, then his outlook must prevail as you look out upon our culture. Is what you see what he desires? Is our culture's world-and-life-view his view? If it is not—and it is certain that it is not—then you must side with your Lord regardless of the world's opinion either of him or of you.

Finally, there is Latin, the language of law and good government. This reminds us that Jesus is the supreme lawgiver and law administrator. His laws must govern your conduct, and you must be obedient to him, even though his commands may be countermanded by the state or any other human authority.

Pilate put his inscription on the cross primarily to irritate the leaders of the Jewish people, and it did irritate them. It irritated them so much that they came back to him and requested that the wording be changed. They wanted the sign to read, "He said, 'I am King of the Jews.'" These leaders hated Jesus so much that in his death they did not want to give even the appearance of recognizing his kingship. The accusation—JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE
JEWS—revealed their nature as it truly was. But notice that it did that for Pilate too, for in response, the cowardly recalcitrance of Pilate emerged clearly so that the one who did not have courage to acquit One whom he knew to be innocent nevertheless stupidly dug in his heels and responded, "What I have written, I have written" (John 19:22).

The cross always reveals men as they are. It reveals the soldiers' nature, the nature of the crowds, that of the faithful women and John, who was also in the city of Jerusalem at this period. It reveals our hearts as well.

We cannot be hypocrites before that cross. It is too great, its scope too universal. What does the cross show you to be? Does it show you to be a sinner—without hope, under condemnation—because you have no part in the Savior? Or does it show you to be his follower? God grant that if you have not yet done so, you might find him as Savior and begin to follow him as your rightful King and Lord.

Chapter 245.
Scripture Fulfilled in Christ's Death

John 19:23-24

At an earlier point in our study of John's Gospel I quoted some words of Martin Luther that I wish to quote again here because the point of the earlier passage and the point of this one are similar.

Luther had been preaching a sermon on John 5:39, the verse in our study of John at which I quoted him earlier; it said of the Scriptures, "And they are they that testify of me." Luther noted this and then added, "Here Christ would indicate the principle reason why the Scripture was given by God. Men are to study and search in it and to learn that He, *He*, Mary's Son, is the one who is able to give eternal life to all who come to Him and believe on Him. Therefore he who would correctly and profitably read Scripture should see to it that he finds Christ in it; then he finds life eternal without fail. On the other hand, if I do not so study and understand Moses and the prophets as to find that Christ came from Heaven for the sake of my salvation, became man, suffered, died, was buried, rose, and ascended to Heaven so that through Him I enjoy reconciliation with God, forgiveness of all my sins, grace, righteousness, and life eternal, then my reading in Scripture is of no help whatsoever to my salvation. I may, of course, become a learned man by reading and studying Scripture and may preach what I have acquired; yet all this would do me no good whatsoever. For if I do not know and do not find the Christ, neither do I find salvation and life

eternal. In fact, I actually find bitter death; for our good God has decreed that no other name is given among men whereby they may be saved except the name of Jesus
(Acts 4:12)."

Luther's point is that the Scriptures are, both in their general outline and in specific details, God's Word to us about Jesus. It is undoubtedly this keen spiritual insight that made him the tower of strength and winsome exegete that he was. Luther believed that the Bible was God's Word and that it was about Jesus. Consequently, whenever he approached the Bible, he knew from the start who was speaking in it and what its theme was.

It would be good if all who pretend to teach the Bible in our day had a similar insight and conviction. Unfortunately, they do not. Instead of reading the Bible as the Word of God, many read it as the words of Isaiah, Matthew, John, Paul, or even "Second Isaiah," "the Deuteronomist," "Q," or some other supposed source. Instead of seeing the Bible as a book about Jesus, they see it as a collection of works with varying and sometimes even conflicting themes. As a result, the Bible does not make sense to such people, and they find it confusing. Moreover, they often also fail to believe it and in the Christ presented in its pages. Failing to believe in him, they miss salvation.

Four Prophecies

This was not the case with the apostles. Undoubtedly, there were times early in their lives and experiences of Jesus when the Bible they had (the Old Testament) was confusing. They read it and heard it taught, like most pious Jews of their day. But they did not understand it. Specifically, they did not understand its prophecies of the coming Messiah. This was even true during their three-year association with Jesus. But when he died, rose again, and came to them after those events to explain how all that had happened to him had been prophesied beforehand in the Scriptures, their confusion vanished and their outlook changed. Now they knew that the Bible was indeed about Jesus, and

they saw it in a new light. In fact, they now saw prophecies of his life on many of its pages.

This was true of John, no less than the others. Much that had happened to Jesus up to this point had been in fulfillment of Scripture. One commentator has pointed out that no less than "twenty Old Testament predictions relating to events that would surround the death of Christ, words written centuries before his first advent, were fulfilled with precision within a twenty-four-hour period at the time of his crucifixion." John has not drawn attention to this fulfillment of Scripture before this. Now he begins to note the events of the crucifixion which were in fulfillment of specific Old Testament prophecies, suggesting (1) that God was in charge of these events, (2) that the Scriptures do not fail, and (3) that Jesus is indeed the anointed One of God, the Messiah. There are four such prophecies:

1. The division of Christ's clothing among the soldiers of the execution party and the casting of lots for his seamless inner garment. John describes this in verses 23 and 24. It is prophesied in Psalm 22:18.
2. The giving of a vinegar solution to Jesus to drink, in fulfillment of Psalm 69:21. Jesus provoked this act by exclaiming, "I thirst." John tells of this fulfillment in verses 28 and 29.
3. The breaking of the legs of the two thieves coupled with the decision not to break Jesus' legs. John describes this in verses 31-33 and 36. It was prophesied in Psalm 34:20.
4. The piercing of Christ's side with a spear. John mentions this in verses 34-35, and 37. It is prophesied in Zechariah 12:10.

Clearly John believed, as did the other writers of the New Testament, Martin Luther and the vast host down through history who followed in their train, that the Bible is God's Word about his Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. It is where we meet him, learn of him, believe in him, and grow

into the fullness of the faith. Through a study of the Word this happens. Without it, none of these things take place.

Psalm 22:18

The first of John's references to the fulfillment of Scripture in the events surrounding Christ's death is the matter of the dividing of his clothing, which John notes as a fulfillment of Psalm 22:18. It is that which we primarily want to look at in this study.

We have already seen that a condemned man was customarily taken to the place of execution by a detachment of four soldiers under the command of a centurion. It was the prerequisite of these soldiers to receive the clothes of the victim. William Barclay points out in his commentary that the Jews normally wore five articles of clothing: the shoes, turban, girdle, tunic, and outer robe. He suggests that, since there were four soldiers and five articles of apparel, each had one, and one article (the inner garment or tunic) was left over. This may have been the case, or it may have been that the first four items were torn apart or otherwise divided. Regardless of that, the inner garment was without seam, being woven in one piece from top to bottom. It could not be divided. So the soldiers cast lots or gambled for it. John notes this, saying, "'Let's not tear it,' they said to one another. 'Let's decide by lot who will get it.' This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, 'They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.'"

Many have read a great deal into this reference. In the early church, the mention of Christ's seamless robe suggested to Origen the wholeness of Christ's teaching. Cyprian thought that it symbolized the unity of the church. To Cyril it meant the virgin birth. In more recent times and with greater reason, it has been understood as suggesting the perfect righteousness of Christ now imparted to the sinner as the basis of his justification.

There may be some truth in each of these explanations, but I doubt that John or any other of the Gospel writers had them in mind. What

they are concerned to emphasize is that this specific detail of the crucifixion, like all the other details, was planned for and prophesied by God. Consequently, neither this nor any other aspect of the death of Christ was accidental.

The Suffering Savior

This is not to say that no more may be learned from this prophecy, however. On the contrary, Psalm 22 in particular seems to have been on the Lord's mind during these final hours of his earthly life. Therefore, it gives us a clue as to what he thought his suffering meant and what was to be accomplished by it.

A number of years ago in an article for *Eternity* magazine, I pointed out the significance of this psalm for understanding what occupied the anguished mind of Christ during the dark hours of Calvary. I would like to share some of those earlier conclusions here. I noted in the first place that, although there is no reason why we should know what was in Christ's mind during those three hours of darkness, between noon and three in the afternoon, when he died, there are nevertheless several clues which relate his thoughts to this psalm and thereby indicate that he was thinking of it. The first clue is that at the beginning of the period of darkness Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34), a direct quotation of Psalm 22:1. The second clue is that at the end of three hours of darkness he cried out again, saying, "It is finished" (John 19:30). This phrase is a quotation of the last verse of Psalm 22 (v. 31).

The English reader will not find this phrase in the most common English translation of Psalm 22, but it is a legitimate translation of the one Hebrew word that occurs there. The verse itself can read, "They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that *it is finished."*

This has great implications, for it means that during the hours in which the Lord hung upon the cross his mind traversed the scope of the psalm. He thought of the alienation of the One who was made sin for mankind.

He passed on to reflect on the description of suffering the psalm includes. He thought of the final section that speaks of the spread of the gospel among the Gentiles. Only after that did Jesus utter the phrase that marks the psalm's ending.

In this psalm there are three pictures of Christ that partially explain his suffering. The first verse speaks of Christ as having been *forsaken.* I have read good books suggesting that Jesus was not really forsaken by God, that he only imagined he was forsaken, that Jesus almost lost his faith in God but he recovered it later when he knew that God had sustained him. This is wrong. Christ was bearing the penalty for sin, which is death (Rom. 6:23), and death means separation from God. What is death? Certainly not physical death alone, but spiritual death! And spiritual death is the separation of the soul from the source of life, which is God. That is the penalty Christ bore for human sin—separation from God. So when he cried out in a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" it was the cry of one actually abandoned by the Father.

You and I can never pretend fully to understand this. We cannot imagine how there can be a division in the Godhead. How can God the Son be forsaken by God the Father? It is a great mystery. But it is true nevertheless. Christ was forsaken, and it was only by this means that he accomplished our salvation.

The second picture of the suffering Savior comes from Psalm 22:6: "I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people." Why a worm? Why this unusual image? To understand this image one must realize that the Hebrew word for worm had come to refer almost exclusively to a special kind of worm from which the people of the Near East derived a valuable crimson dye. It was much like an insect that exists in Mexico today called the *cochineal.* The worm known to the Hebrews was the *tola*. The dye was formed from its blood, released when the animal was crushed. In Hebrew the word for scarlet literally means the "splendor of the *tola*."

The *tola* is referred to several times in Scripture. It is the worm that spoiled the manna in the wilderness. The scarlet dye for the linen of the wilderness Tabernacle came from the blood of the *tola*. It is said of Saul in 2 Samuel that he dressed the women of Israel in scarlet, that is, he introduced a period of such prosperity that all their robes could be dyed.

This image throws light upon Christ's thoughts, for when Jesus thought of himself as the *tola*, he thought of himself as the worm who is *crushed* for God's people. His blood was shed for us that we might be clothed in bright raiment.

The third image refers to *execution.* The psalm says, "Rescue me from the mouth of the lions, save me from the horns of the [unicorns]" (v. 21). The animal mentioned in this verse is not really a unicorn, for a unicorn does not exist (in spite of the fact that the translators of the King James Bible probably thought so). Actually it is a type of wild ox with long pointed horns to which victims are said sometimes to have been bound for execution. As Jesus thought about this image, he may have reflected on the forensic aspect of his death and remembered that God was putting him to death for our sin.

Christ's Soul Satisfied

Forsaken! Crushed! Executed! These ideas all help to explain Christ's crucifixion. But there is a more moving concept to come. That Jesus was, even just before his crucifixion, thinking of other people, can be seen in his words to the women when he was on the way to Golgotha ("Weep for yourselves," Luke 23:28) and in his words to Mary and John shortly after the cross was erected ("Dear woman, here is your son.... Here is your mother," John 19:26-27). From noon until three in the afternoon, when God shrouded the cross with darkness, his mind turned to the meaning and purpose of his suffering. His thoughts were of himself. But his mind eventually turned back again to other people as he went on to think of the fruit his work would produce in those who would later become Christians.

First, he thought of his disciples. We know this because immediately after the verse that speaks most clearly of Christ's death, the psalm goes on to say, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you" (v. 22). Not long before his crucifixion Jesus had prayed for his disciples—in the long prayer recorded in John 17. Now, even while he is dying, he thinks of them again. Before they had been only followers. Now they are brethren, because by his death they were to become sons of God and coheirs with him of God's glory.

At the very end Jesus looked to the spread of the gospel beyond his disciples, even beyond Judaism, to the Gentiles. This is suggested by the contrast between verses 22 and 25 of this psalm. Verse 22 says, "I will declare your name... in the congregation." In the context of the psalm this obviously means the congregation of Israel. Verse 25 speaks about "praise in the *great* assembly. "With equal clarity this speaks of the spread of the gospel beyond Israel to the Gentiles. The psalm goes on to say, "All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him" (v. 27).

That verse is wonderful to me, for I am included in that number. And so are you, if you are a
Gentile who believes in Jesus. He was thinking of you as he hung on the cross. He died for you. He died for you personally. If you do not believe in him, he wants you to come to him. It may help you to know that in the moment of his death he looked forward to the spread of the gospel among the Gentiles. And his soul was satisfied.

Chapter 246.
Words from the Cross

John 19:25-27

There is something particularly solemn and significant about the last words of men and women. The reason is that, in the face of death, what a person is often comes clearly to the surface and is reflected in speech. For example, Napoleon Bonaparte, the famous French general and

emperor, said while waiting for his death, "I die before my time, and my body will be given back to the earth. Such is the fate of him who has been called the great Napoleon. What an abyss between my deep misery and the eternal kingdom of Christ."

Voltaire, the noted French infidel, is reported to have said to his doctor, "I am abandoned by God and man! I will give you half of what I am worth if you will give me six months' life."

Thomas Hobbes, the skeptic who corrupted the faith of some of England's great men, exclaimed, "If I had the whole world, I would give it to live one day. I shall be glad to find a hole to creep out of the world at. I am about to take a leap into the dark."

These statements and others by similarly well-known men reveal more about their true outlook on life and their true hope than anything they might have said in more fortuitous moments. They are often quite grim. Fortunately, one can hardly think of these sayings without thinking of the even more famous words of Jesus of Nazareth, the founder of the Christian faith, who in his death spoke words not of despair but of hope and thereby revealed much about his own personal faith and that of Christianity.

The Final Analysis

I have always considered it unfortunate that the seven sayings of Jesus on the cross have been termed his "last words." The implication is that Jesus did not rise again; but he did rise again, and he returned to his disciples to say many more things to them. In fact, these last teachings are actually more important than those from the cross, for they have much more to say about Christianity. On the other hand, the sayings from the cross (although wrongly termed the "last words") are nevertheless significant. They are significant because they show that (1) Jesus was in clear possession of his faculties until the very last moment, when he delivered up his spirit to the Father, (2) he understood his death was intended to provide salvation for the world, and (3) he knew his death would be effectual to that end. Moreover, the words also show his

habitual concern and love for other persons, even at the moment of his most acute suffering.

The words from the cross are these:

1. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). These words are a prayer for God to forgive those who were crucifying him. They show the merciful heart of the Savior.

2. "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). These words were spoken to the believing thief and were a confident promise of salvation.

3. "Dear woman, here is your son.... Here is your mother" (John 19:26-27). In these words Jesus commended his mother, Mary, to the care of the beloved disciple.

4. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34; Matt. 27:46). In this saying the true nature of the atonement is made clear and the deep anguish of the Lord is revealed to us.

5. "I thirst" (John 19:28). This request shows the true humanity of the Lord. But even more important, it shows his desire that every fact of his death (as of his life) be in accord with Scripture.

6. "It is finished" (John 19:30). These are the most important words of all, for they refer not merely to his life, perfect and exemplary as it was, but to his completed atonement for sin. Because of this we can be sure of salvation.

7. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). These words show Jesus to have been in control of his life until the last and indicate that the relationship between himself and the Father, which earlier had been broken as he was made sin for us (Mark 15:34), was restored.

Two Christ Loved

Not one of the Gospels contains all seven of these statements, however. Matthew and Mark each contain one, though they allude to others. Luke and John each contain three, but their lists are different and neither one mentions the saying that Matthew and Mark contain ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). John includes the words regarding Jesus' mother and the beloved disciple, "I thirst," and the final affirmation that the work of the atonement was finished.

It is easy to understand why John includes the words of the Savior to Mary and the
corresponding words to that disciple into whose care she was committed. The reason is that John was himself that disciple. Consequently, the charge was his charge and the importance of it came home to him as to no other.

Let us think of these two whom Christ loved possibly more than any other two people upon earth. Let us think, first of all, of Mary and of the pain that was hers in this moment. One commentator wrote, "What sorrow it must have caused her when, because there was no room in the inn, she had to lay her newly-born Babe in the manger! What anguish must have been hers when she learned of Herod's purpose to destroy her infant's life! What trouble was given her when she was forced on his account to flee into a foreign country and sojourn for several years in the land of Egypt! What piercings of soul must have been hers when she saw her Son despised and rejected of men! What grief must have wrung her heart as she beheld him hated and persecuted by his own nation! And who can estimate what she passed through as she stood there at the cross? If Christ was the Man of Sorrows, was she not the woman of sorrows?" An anonymous poet of the Middle Ages has expressed the sorrows of Mary in these words:

Near the cross her vigil keeping,
Stood the Mother, worn with weeping,
Where He hung, the dying Lord:

Through her soul, in anguish groaning,
Bowed in sorrow, sighing, moaning,
Passed the sharp and piercing sword.
O the weight of her affliction!
Hers, who won God's benediction,
Hers, who bore God's Holy One:
O that speechless, ceaseless yearning!
O Those dim eyes
never turning From
her wondrous,
suffering Son!

As we think about these words and about the scene they describe, we recall the saying of the aged Simeon, spoken when the infant Jesus was presented in the temple by Joseph and Mary. God had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ, and now, coming into the temple area at the very moment when Jesus was being presented, he took him up in his arms and blessed him. Then, after uttering that psalm of praise known as the *Nunc Dimitis*, he turned to Mary and said, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too" (Luke 2:34-35). What strange words those were! A piercing sorrow for one highly favored by God? How unlikely it all seemed, particularly at the time Simeon spoke! Yet it all came to pass. Here at the cross we see the fulfillment of Simeon's words.

One lesson we learn from this scene is the certainty of the fulfillment of prophecy. God says, "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please ... what I have said, that will I bring about" (Isa. 46:10-11).

Another lesson is that sorrow, even such acute sorrow as this, may come even to those who are greatly loved by Jesus. When it comes to us, as it may, we must not think that it is because of God's disfavor. We think of the story of the death of Lazarus and of those words to Jesus with which the account begins, "Lord, the one you love is sick" (John 11:3). Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters. Yet Lazarus grew sick and eventually

died, and the grief of the sisters was great. Love and sickness are not incompatible in God's economy. God's favor and sorrow sometimes flow along together.

But again, this is not all we can say, for although it is true that the beloved of God often suffer for God's sometimes hidden purposes, it is nevertheless true that we take comfort in his knowledge of our sorrows and his solace for us in the midst of them. In these words we notice that Jesus was aware of Mary (even in his own sorrow), cared for her, and acted to provide what was needful.

The Beloved Disciple

The other person involved in this episode is John, the beloved disciple. He is here at the cross. But the background for his appearance is the contrasting picture of the scattering disciples at the time of the Savior's arrest in Gethsemane. The Lord had warned the disciples of their approaching cowardice—"This very night you will *all* fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'" (Matt. 26:31).

They all protested. Peter said, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." The rest of the disciples agreed (v. 35). But Jesus was right, and they were wrong. They had forsaken him, John included; Jesus was left to the scorn and cruelty of his enemies.

Yet notice, the cowardice of the disciples was only temporary. Later, after his resurrection, they would seek him at the appointed place in Galilee (Matt. 28:16) and would speak boldly on his behalf. And here, even before the resurrection, there was at least one who sought him out even while he hung on Calvary. Why? It is not difficult to discern why. That which brought John to Calvary was the same thing that brought Mary there, and the other women—Mary, the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. It was that which later brought these and others to the tomb and which brought Mary Magdalene back even after she knew that the body of Jesus was no longer in the garden. It was love, love for Jesus. Thus, although they can do nothing at all, they still want to be as near to him as possible and linger to the end. Mary loved him. Hers was

a mother's love. John loved him too; this was "the disciple whom Jesus loved" and who, quite naturally, loved him in turn.

Do you love him? I do not ask whether you have forsaken him in some moment of danger. I do not ask whether you have served him as you should have done or have failed to serve him. I do not ask whether you have denied him. I only ask, Do you love him? If you answer yes, then come to him regardless of what terrible thing you may have done in your life or regardless of what good thing you may have failed to do.

John came to him in spite of his earlier failure. What did he find? Did Jesus rebuke him? Did he look with scorn on one who could not watch with him even one short hour and then forsook him when the moment of testing came? Not at all! Jesus did not rebuke John on his return, any more than he rebuked Peter or any of the others. Instead, he gave John an unmistakable privilege. He committed his mother to his charge. If you are one who has deserted Christ, do as John did and as Arthur W. Pink admonishes in his remarks on these verses: "Cease then your wanderings and return at once to Christ, and he will greet you with a word of welcome and cheer; and who knows but what he has some honorous commission awaiting you!"

"Jesus, Therefore"

We have spoken of Mary in this study and of John too. But clearly, the central figure in this moving drama is Jesus. He is the One who knows Mary's sorrows. He is the One who knows John's love. Now he speaks out of his own love to provide for each one.

The one who hangs on the cross is even at this late moment still providing for others. He is stripped of everything, yet he leaves rich legacies. To his executioners, who even now stand guard over him, he bequeaths a prayer for pardon—"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). To the dying but believing thief he grants the promise of salvation—"Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). In his words to John and Mary he grants a

continuing legacy of the most tender love. By this word he gives a son to his mother and a mother to his friend.

It is customary in Catholic theology to see this word as a commending of John, and through him all Christ's disciples, to the patronage of Mary. For example, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen remarks, "When our Lord spoke of John, he did not refer to him as John for then he would have been only the son of Zebedee. Rather, in him all humanity was commended to Mary, who became the mother of men, not by metaphor, or figure of speech, but by pangs of birth." Actually the opposite was the case. Jesus did not commend John to Mary, but Mary to John. The real meaning of this episode is that Jesus was caring for his mother and thus fulfilling the Old Testament commandment to "honor your father and mother" (Exod. 20:12). So must we honor that commandment. We are under a God-given obligation to honor our parents, and that obligation does not cease even though we should come of age or move far from them.

We note too that spiritual responsibilities do not remove these obligations. What could be more of a spiritual responsibility than that which the Lord himself was fulfilling? At the very moment at which he spoke these words our Lord was dying for sinners. He was offering himself as satisfaction to the outraged justice of almighty God. Yet even at this moment, he does not fail to provide for her who was his mother.

There is one thing more. When Jesus commends Mary to John, he bypasses his own unbelieving brethren and leaves her to the care of the beloved disciple instead. Is this accidental? Is it only because John happened to be near the cross at this moment? It is hard to think so. Rather, we sense that the Lord is here bringing into existence a new family based on his atonement. As Mariano Di Gangi writes, "Our Lord brings into being the brotherhood of believers. He fashions the fellowship of the household of faith. This is the new society, which is not segregated according to race or nationality. It is not predicated upon social standing or economic power. It consists of those whose faith meets at the cross, and whose experience of forgiveness flows from the cross."

This is our fellowship if we are truly Christ's followers. We should conduct ourselves as those who are members of it by caring for and loving one another. Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

Chapter 247.
"I Thirst"

John 19:28-29

It is hard for those of us who have grown up in western lands to understand the horror of thirst or the importance of water to those who live in the world's desert areas. But if this is true in regard to normal circumstances, which it is, how are we to appreciate the thirst of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary?

In lands like ours water may be a thing of beauty or a pleasant delight. But it does not speak of life itself, which it did to those who lived in biblical lands. "Fierce thirst, and the benediction of the water which quenches it, are intensely real in the Bible," writes E. M. Blaiklock in an essay on this theme. "In Genesis the herdsmen of the patriarchs strive with the alien for the wells laboriously cut in the hot rock. In Exodus, the panic of thirst shakes and threatens Moses' leadership. Psalmists and prophets liken joy, happiness, life itself, God's grace, to the blessed stream and the fountain filled. At Sychar, and in the Temple court, the Lord likens water to eternal life; on the Mount he promises fulfillment only to those who thirst for righteousness, and the words are caught up by the closing pages of the Bible."

In biblical lands thirst was a horrible reality. We cannot fully understand it. Yet we must try if we are to appreciate the second of the three words from the cross which John includes in his narrative. The Bible describes Christ's thirst by saying, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and

my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death" (Ps. 22:14-15). It was in the midst of suffering like this that our Lord cried out "I thirst" and was given a sponge dipped in a cheap wine like vinegar, as John indicates.

Christ's True Humanity

If it does nothing else, this incident reminds us forcefully of the Lord's true humanity, which we are sometimes in the habit of forgetting. The liberal church tends to forget Christ's deity or else denies it outright. Evangelicals do not do this; they tend to suppress the Lord's humanity, considering him so much God that he can hardly be human. But Jesus was both. He was very God of very God and very man of very man, as the creed confesses. He was not a deified man or a humanized God. He was the God-man, forever God and now forever man. In his incarnation he took our humanity to himself.

Pink writes, "While here on earth the Lord Jesus gave full proof of his deity. He spoke with divine wisdom, he acted in divine holiness. He exhibited divine power, and he displayed divine love. He read mens' minds, moved mens' hearts, and compelled mens' wills. When he was pleased to exert his power all nature was subject to his bidding. A word from him and disease fled, a storm was stilled, the devil left him, the dead were raised to life. So truly was he God manifest in the flesh, he could say, 'He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.' "So, too, while he tabernacled among men the Lord Jesus gave full proof of his humanity—sinless humanity. He entered this world as a babe and was 'wrapped in swaddling clothes' (Luke 2:7). As a child, we are told, he 'increased in wisdom and stature' (Luke 2:52). As a boy we find him 'asking questions' (Luke 2:46). As a man he was 'wearied' in body (John 4:6). He was 'an hungered' (Matt. 4:2). He 'slept' (Mark 4:38). He 'rejoiced' (Luke 10:21). He 'groaned' (John 11:33). And here in our text he cried, 'I thirst' That evidenced his humanity. God does not thirst. The angels do not. We shall not in glory—'they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more' (Rev. 7:16). But we thirst now because we are human and living in a world of sorrow. And Christ thirsted because he

was man—'Wherefore, in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren' (Heb. 2:17)."

The Problem of Suffering

But it is not only Christ's humanity that we see in this incident. We also see answers to the problem of human pain and suffering, which is one of life's great puzzles. We know that life is filled with sorrow. How are we to deal with it? What is the biblical approach? What are the biblical answers? Not all the answers are given in this incident—it is possible that some are given nowhere—but Christ's words at least point us in the right direction.

There have been four major historical approaches to the problem of suffering apart from the biblical approach. The first is an attempt to deny that evil exists. In antiquity this view was developed in a philosophical system known as Docetism. It built upon common Greek philosophy, in which "spirit" was considered to be good and "matter" evil. It was inherent in this distinction that the spiritual world was more real than the material world. The Docetists simply went a bit beyond this to deny the ultimate reality of matter. In their view, in the ultimate analysis suffering and evil were an illusion. In our day the same approach is taken by Christian Science and by some of the Eastern religions.

What is the biblical response to this denial of evil and suffering? Quite simply, the Bible denies that answer. It acknowledges the reality of evil and the horror of suffering. The very fact that the Lord endured the suffering of the cross is disproof of that solution.

The second major approach to the problem of suffering may also be traced to Greek philosophy, to Stoicism. Stoicism was the philosophy of the "stiff upper lip." It acknowledged evil, just as it acknowledged good. But it was fatalistic. It believed that good and evil enter a person's life according to fixed mechanical laws. Nothing can be done about it. Therefore, the only possible response to evil (and good) is simply to control one's response to what happens. The proper way to live is to

repress one's responses to the degree that good things do not make us joyous nor bad things make us sad. But this is not the biblical approach either. The Bible does not ask us to be stoics. Rather, it calls upon us to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. Jesus enjoyed himself in joyous company. Again, he was able to weep when there was suffering.

The third approach is the "pleasure first" philosophy of hedonism. In this view also evil and good are real, as in Stoicism; but the solution proposed is to fill up life with so much pleasure that suffering is simply overshadowed. We are to avoid suffering. We are to do everything in our power to have good times and good experiences. Is this biblical? Not at all. True, the Bible acknowledges good times and pleasures and encourages us to be thankful to the Lord for them. But we are not told to avoid the sufferings of life. Rather, we are to identify with those who are suffering and enter into their sufferings in order to help them by taking some of their pain to ourselves. If the Lord had followed the course of the hedonists, he would not have become a man at all.

Fourth, there is the approach that is taken by modern existentialism, particularly the variety that regards human existence as ultimately absurd. In this philosophy, life has no meaning at all. But since we are still faced with the problem of living (if we do not opt for suicide, which Albert Camus has termed the "only ultimate philosophical question"), the only way to do so is by "dialectical courage." This means to go on with a smile as if life is filled with joy and meaning, even though we know it is not.

It is this approach, perhaps more than any other, that urges Christian people to respond biblically. But in doing so we have to be very cautious. The first thing we want to say is that suffering is not meaningless, because in a universe ruled by God nothing is meaningless. Suffering is linked to sin and is therefore, in some sense, a consequence of it. There was no suffering before the fall. There is no suffering in heaven. There will be none in the redeemed earth, where there will also be no sin. But while this is true, we must nevertheless be careful not to establish a simple one-toone relationship between a

person's suffering and the same person's sin. It is true that we all suffer. It is true that we all sin. But our suffering is not necessarily for our own sin, nor in direct proportion to it. Therefore, the one who suffers most is not necessarily the greatest sinner. Nor is the one who suffers less more innocent.

Right here our Lord's pain is instructive, for although his suffering was closely linked to sin—he was suffering for sin, and it was sinful men who had caused him to suffer—his suffering was nevertheless not for his own sin, for he had none. We conclude then that although there is meaning in suffering, although it is linked to sin and is never allowed into a believer's life except for God's own, sometimes hidden purposes, it is nevertheless not always possible to tell what this meaning is. Above all, we must be cautious in explaining to someone else why he or she is suffering.

Yet there is more we can say: suffering can be redeemed. It is not the last word. We do not need to be defeated by it. R. C. Sproul writes, "That is why no true Calvinist would ever hide behind the doctrine of God's sovereignty in the face of social responsibility, in the face of the responsibilities of the agents of alleviation of suffering in this world. We know that suffering can be redeemed and that we can be used of God to bring that redemption to bear. So we are concerned about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, visiting and caring for the orphan and the widow. Ultimately we know that suffering is fully redemptive in the hands of
God."

How is that true? It is true because Jesus entered into our suffering and finally died that we might be delivered from sin and its effects. At this point his physical thirst becomes symbolic of our spiritual thirst and his death the means of alleviating it. Horatius Bonar once wrote of that means:

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,

Stoop down and drink, and live."
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, And now I live in Him.

If you have not come to Christ, then you need to respond to that One who died for your salvation.

Jesus and the Scriptures

This incident teaches something else also, something entirely different from these first lessons. It concerns Jesus' attitude to the Scriptures and his conscious attempts to fulfill them.

We know from the Gospels and also from study of various Old Testament passages that many significant details of the Lord's death were clearly prophesied and therefore fell out in strict conformity to the will of God. Pink writes, "Every important detail of the great Tragedy had been written down beforehand. The betrayal by a familiar friend (Ps. 41:9), the forsaking of the disciples through being offended at him (Ps. 31:11), the false accusation (Ps. 35:11), the silence before his judges (Isa. 53:7), the being proven guiltless (Isa. 53:9), the numbering of him with the transgressors (Isa. 53:12), the being crucified (Ps. 22:16), the mockery of the spectators (Ps. 109:25), the taunt of nondeliverance (Ps. 22:7, 8), the gambling for his garments (Ps. 22:18), the prayer for his enemies (Isa. 53:12), the being forsaken of God (Ps. 22:1), the thirsting (Ps. 69:21), the yielding of his spirit into the hands of the Father (Ps. 31:5), the bones not broken (Ps. 34:20), the burial in a rich man's tomb (Isa. 53:9)—all plainly foretold centuries before they came to pass. What a convincing evidence of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures!"

But we notice as we study the incident of Christ's thirst, comparing it with this or any other list of fulfilled prophecies, that it has a unique quality. The Lord had nothing to do with some of these fulfillments; they fell out in simple correspondence to God's will (the false

accusations, the verdicts at the trials, the crucifixion with thieves, the gambling for his garments, the fact that his bones were not broken). In others Christ played a part (in being silent before his judges, in praying for his enemies, in yielding his spirit into the hands of the Father). But here, in this unique incident of his crying out "I thirst," we are told that Jesus did so specifically in order that "the scripture might be fulfilled" (v. 28). That is, though the Scriptures certainly would be fulfilled, Jesus did not consider this a reason to do nothing, when it was within his power to bring about the fulfillment through his own action.

We know from one of our earlier studies that Jesus had been meditating upon the Scriptures during the hours of his agony. He had been thinking of Psalm 22 especially. Apparently his mind had also run over other prophecies, almost, it would seem, checking them off to assure himself that everything prophesied concerning his life had been accomplished. Was there anything in Genesis that had been left undone? No. Exodus? No. Deuteronomy? No. At last he reached Psalm 69 where it is said in verse 21, 'They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst." Already they had offered him gall to deaden his pain (Mark 15:23), but there had been no offer of vinegar for his thirst. Therefore, he calls out "I thirst" that this might be completed.

This was the last prophecy. So we are told, "When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (v. 30).

Fulfilling the Scriptures

The application for those who believe in the Scriptures is this. If we believe the Bible is God's Word, we believe that the prophecies it contains will come true. But do we sit back and do nothing, as some might recommend? Or do we actively seek to participate in fulfilling prophecy?

Let me give some examples. In John 17:17, Jesus prays for the sanctification of his people, saying, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." We will be sanctified. But does this mean that we are

therefore to do nothing to seek to grow spiritually? Not at all. The means of our sanctification are specified in this verse. They are study of, meditation upon, and memorization of God's Word. This is our responsibility. So although ultimately we will all be made like Jesus (1 John 3:2-3), in the meantime we will be sanctified only as we use the means God has placed at our disposal.

In the same prayer Jesus prays for the unity of the church: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (vv. 20-21). This petition is for the present time. It is that "the world may believe." But what then? Are we free to do as we please, attack our brothers and sisters in Christ, destroy or weaken our unity? Not at all. Rather we must work at this, making "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

Again, we must work at the missionary mandate. We are told by the Lord that the "gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14). Nothing could be clearer: The gospel *will* be preached. This is the prophecy. But the prophecy does not relieve us of the responsibility of participating in its fulfillment by becoming agents through which it comes to pass.

Is prophecy a deterrent to human action? Not at all. It is a stimulus, for none are so bold in God's service as those who know the outcome in advance and encourage themselves by claiming God's promises.

Chapter 248.
No Death like Jesus' Death

John 19:30

If Christ is Christianity and if the final week of Christ's life is its center, then the center of that week is certainly the moment of Christ's death on Calvary. That moment is therefore the focal point of all history, and the words "It is finished" are an important expression of it.

The importance of those words, the sixth in the series of seven spoken from the cross, is that they point to Christ's death as an achievement. Elsewhere in the Gospels we are told that Jesus uttered a loud cry just before his death (Matt. 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46); since two of the Gospels also tell us that Jesus had been given a drink just before this, it would seem that this was Christ's cry. In other words, Christ's words were not the final gasping sob of a defeated man or even the firm deliberate declaration of one who was resigned to his fate. They were a triumphant declaration that the turning point in history had been reached and that the work that Jesus had been sent into the world to do had been done.

It is this that makes Christ's death unique. As an example of patient endurance of abuse and suffering, it may perhaps be matched by other deaths. As a fitting end for One who, like the prophets, bore a faithful witness to God's truth even when that truth was rejected, it may perhaps be paralleled. But Christ's death cannot be matched in its fullest sense, because Jesus (and no other) achieved our salvation by his suffering. The apostle Paul speaks of it, saying, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Gal. 4:4-5). Again he writes, "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at

the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:21-26).

Because Christ's atonement is so important, we need to consider it at some length. In this and the following studies we will look at the nature, necessity, perfection, and extent of the atonement.

Christ's Death a Sacrifice

When we consider the nature of the atonement we immediately find ourselves in the midst of a world of biblical ideas and imagery without which its nature cannot really be understood. Central to this world of ideas and imagery is the notion of sacrifice and the accompanying thought of substitution. Sacrifice has to do with the death of an innocent victim, usually an animal. Substitution means that this death was in place of the death of someone else.

The background of this concept lies in the truth that all who have ever lived are sinners, having broken God's law, and that the penalty for sin is death. The Bible declares, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Rom. 3:10-12). Moreover the Bible declares that the penalty for sin is death. It says, "The soul that sins will die" (Ezek. 18:4). This death is not merely physical death, though it is that. It is spiritual death as well. Death is separation. Physical death is the separation of the soul and spirit from the body. Spiritual death is the separation of the soul and the spirit from God. This is what we deserve as a consequence of our sin. But Jesus took that death to himself by his sacrifice. He became our substitute by experiencing both physical and spiritual death in our place.

There is a very vivid illustration of this principle in the early chapters of Genesis. In these chapters Adam and Eve had sinned and were now in terror of the consequences. God had warned them. He had said, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of food and evil, for when you eat of it you will

surely die" (Gen. 2:1617). At this point they probably did not have a very clear idea of what death was, but they knew it was serious. Consequently, when they had sinned through disobedience and then later had heard God walking toward them in the garden, they tried to hide.

They could not hide from God. No one can. So we are told that God called them out of hiding and began to deal with their transgression. What should we expect to happen as a result of this confrontation? Here is God who has told our first parents that in the day they sinned they would die. Here also are Adam and Eve who have sinned. In this situation we should expect the immediate execution of the sentence. They had sinned. So if God had put them to death in that moment, both physically and spiritually, banishing them from his presence forever, it would have been just.

But that is not what we find. Instead, we have God first rebuking the sin and then, wonder of wonders, performing a sacrifice as a result of which Adam and Eve were clothed with the skins of those animals. This was the first death that anyone had ever witnessed. It was enacted by God. As Adam and Eve looked on they must have been horrified. "So this is death," they must have said. "How horrible!" Yet even as they recoiled from the sacrifice, they must have marveled as well, for what God was showing was that although they themselves deserved to die it was possible for another, in this case two animals, to die in their place. The animals paid the price of their sin. Moreover, they were now clothed in the skins of the animals as a reminder of that fact.

This is the meaning of sacrifice: substitution. It is the death of one on behalf of another. And yet we must say, as the Bible teaches, that the death of animals could never take away the penalty of sin (Heb. 10:4). These were a symbol of how sin was to be taken away, but they were only a symbol. The real and effective sacrifice was performed by Jesus Christ. We sometimes read in theological literature that the ideas of sacrifice and substitution are alien to our culture and therefore that we cannot use these terms to speak of the meaning of Christ's death anymore, at least if we want to be understood. But we must not think

that it was any easier for those who lived in earlier stages of the world's history to understand them. These concepts have always been difficult; that is why God took so much time and such elaborate means to teach them.

Stilling God's Wrath

A second word for understanding the meaning of Christ's death is propitiation (Rom. 3:25). Propitiation also relates to the world of sacrifices. But unlike substitution, which refers primarily to what Jesus did in reference to us (he died in our place), propitiation describes that death in terms of its bearing upon God. The background for this term is the wrath of God which is directed against all sin. Propitiation refers to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in which the justified wrath of God against the sinner was stilled or turned aside and the love of God was enabled to go out to save him.

An Old Testament illustration is helpful. It is the ark of the covenant and the sacrifice which involved it. The ark of the covenant was one of the pieces of furniture for Israel's wilderness tabernacle. It was a chest about a yard long, covered with gold and closed by a solid gold covering known as the mercy seat. The mercy seat had two figures of cherubim standing on either end looking inward. The cherubim had wings which stretched out over the ends of the ark and then came together over the top. The stone tables of the law of Moses were kept within this ark, and the ark itself was kept within the Holy of Holies, the most sacred part of the tabernacle.

The most significant thing about the ark of the covenant is that it was thought of symbolically as being the earthly dwelling place of God. God was thought to dwell in the space between the outstretched wings of the cherubim above the mercy seat. And of course, this is why no one but the high priest was ever to enter the Holy of Holies, and even he was to enter only once a year on the Day of Atonement. God was holy, and sinful men and women who came into his presence would be consumed.

The picture of that ark is a terrible picture, as it was meant to be. There we see God dwelling between the outstretched wings of the cherubim. There we see the law, which we have broken. As God looks down upon the affairs of men this is what he sees—the broken law. So the picture tells us that God in his holiness must judge sin and that sinners are subject to his judicial wrath.

But that is not all, for now the Day of Atonement comes, and on that day the high priest takes the blood of a sacrifice and, bearing it carefully according to all the regulations for this ceremony (for violation of these regulations entailed death), enters the Holy of Holies where it is now sprinkled upon the mercy seat between the presence of God and the law. What is symbolized now? Gloriously, the picture is now no longer of wrath directed against the violators of God's law but rather a picture of mercy in which the wrath of God against sin is satisfied and the sinner is spared. Now when God looks down from between the wings of the cherubim he sees, not the law we have broken, but the blood of the sacrifice. An innocent has died. He has borne our penalty. Thus, we can live.

In discussing sacrifice, I pointed out that the blood of animals could not actually take away sin but that these pointed forward pedagogically to the work of Christ on Calvary. That also applies here. The blood of the sacrifice sprinkled upon the mercy seat by the high priest did not remove sin, but it pointed forward to the One whose death would remove it: Jesus Christ. When he died God's wrath against sin was literally propitiated, which God himself demonstrated by tearing the veil of the temple, separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, in two from top to bottom. Thus did God show that the way into his presence was now open for all who should believe in Jesus.

An interesting sidelight on this meaning of God's death is the speed with which blood sacrifices disappeared in the ancient world once the gospel of Christ was proclaimed. At the time of Christ's death sacrifices were performed everywhere—in the Roman and barbarian worlds as well as within Judaism. But, as Adolf Harnack once pointed out in a striking passage, "Wherever the Christian message... penetrated, the

sacrificial altars were deserted and dealers in sacrificial beasts found no more purchasers.... The death of Christ put an end to all blood-sacrifices." Why did this happen? Harnack explains, "His death [Christ's] had the value of an expiatory sacrifice, for otherwise it would not have had strength to penetrate into that inner world in which the blood-sacrifices originated." Sacrifices ceased because the death of Christ alone met the need they were supposed to satisfy.

Reconciliation

A third word used for describing the effects of Christ's death is reconciliation. Second
Corinthians 5:18-19 provides us with a key passage: "All this if from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."

Reconciliation means "to make one," so the background for this term is the broken relationship between ourselves and God because of sin. We have already seen one example of this in Genesis, for when Adam and Eve sinned and God came to them in the Garden, our first parents hid from God. This had not been the case before their disobedience. Before there had been openness. They had talked with God joyously. Now the relationship that they had enjoyed was broken, and they showed their deep psychological awareness of this by hiding. In a sense men and women have been hiding ever since. We hide through a self-imposed ignorance of spiritual things, through our supposed sophistication or culture, or even (strange as it may seem) through religion—for many religious experiences are attempts to get away from God rather than attempts to find him.

But God comes to us; that is the glory of the gospel. Moreover, when he comes he does what is necessary to heal the broken relationship and bridge the gap. In Eden it was the inauguration of sacrifices. On Calvary it was the ultimate bridge to which the earlier sacrifices pointed. Paul writes, "For there is one God and one mediator between

God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). He means that it is on the basis of Christ's death that the reconciliation takes place.

Bought with a Price

The final word of those most significant for describing the death of Christ is "redemption." "Redemption" is derived from two Latin words: *re*, meaning "again," and *emere*, meaning "to buy." So redemption means "buying again" or "buying back," as in redeeming something that has been pawned or mortgaged. We use the word of material things. The Bible uses the word to signify that we are God's, but have nevertheless fallen into bondage as a result of our sin and now must be purchased out of that bondage by Christ's sacrifice.

Our bondage is to sin's penalty and power. Christ's death frees us from both. On this subject John Murray writes, 'Just as sacrifice is directed to the need created by our guilt, propitiation to the need that arises from the wrath of God, and reconciliation to the need arising from our alienation from God, so redemption is directed to the bondage to which our sin has consigned us. This bondage is, of course, multiform. Consequently redemption as purchase or ransom receives a wide variety of reference and application. Redemption applies to every respect in which we are bound, and it releases us unto a liberty that is nothing less than the liberty of the glory of the children of God." Paul speaks of that redemption in Romans: "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). Peter speaks of it in even more explicit terms: "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

"It is finished," Christ's declaration from the cross, is particularly appropriate for understanding his death as redemption; for one of the meanings of the Greek word *tetelestai*, which underlies it, is "Paid in full!" The word was used in this way in secular business transactions.

Here we come back to the point with which we began. What makes the death of Christ so unique and indeed marks it out as the focal point of history is that it accomplished precisely what needed to be accomplished in regard to our salvation. We deserved to die for sin; Christ died for us. We were under the just wrath of God by reason of our transgressions; Christ bore that wrath in our place. We were alienated from God; Christ reconciled us to him. We were sold under sin; Christ bought our freedom by paying sin's price. From one perspective all this is spiritual. It has to do both with moral matters and with spiritual relationships. But from another point of view, this is as concrete and historical as the birth of Julius Caesar or the death of Socrates.

Chapter 249.
Why Did Jesus Die?

John 19:30

Those who know anything at all about Christianity know that Jesus died to save us from sin, and they know that the source of the decision to save us from sin was God's love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). But why was it necessary for the love of God to achieve its end in this way? Why Jesus? And why the cross? This was the question raised by Anselm of Canterbury in his famous essay *Cur Deus Homo?* ("Why God Became Man"), in which he asked, "For what reason or necessity did God become man and, as we believe and confess, by his death restore life to the world, when he could have done this through another person (angelic or human), or even by a sheer act of will?" Was the cross necessary, or could God have saved the human race through another person or even by a sheer act of will? One writer puts it like this: "If we say that he could not, do we not impugn his power? If we say that he could but would not, do we not impugn his wisdom? Such questions are not scholastic subtleties or

vain curiosities. To evade them is to miss something that is central in the interpretation of the redeeming work of Christ and to miss the vision of some of its essential glory. Why did God become man? Why, having become man, did he die? Why, having died, did he die the accursed death of the cross?"

Two Necessities

In the history of Christian doctrine there have traditionally been two ways in which the necessity of the death of Jesus has been spoken of. One is what we might call *circumstantial* necessity. The other is *absolute* necessity. Let me explain.

The view that we call circumstantial necessity maintains that God, being free and infinite, always has an infinite number of possibilities open to him. Consequently, although he chose to save men and women by the death of Christ, he did not need to do so and could actually have saved them in an infinite number of other ways. If we ask at that point how we can then speak of a "necessity" in the atonement at all, the answer is that because of the circumstances under which God operated, this was the way (chosen out of many ways) that the greatest number of advantages would occur, including the greatest possible glory being given to God. God could have saved us without Christ's having died. But he could not have done so and yet have showed the greatest measure of wisdom and love in the circumstances. When we read that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" of sins (Heb. 9:22), that is indeed true. But it is true only because God has chosen to do things that way. He could have saved us without blood shedding.

The other way to talk about the necessity of Jesus' death is to see it as an absolute necessity. This means literally that, having elected to save some of Adam's fallen race, God had no other means at his disposal than the sacrifice of his beloved Son. This does not mean that God had to send Jesus. He could have elected not to save anyone. But having elected to save them, he was under the necessity of accomplishing this by the death of his Son, a necessity arising out of the perfections of his own nature.

At first glance it might be thought presumptuous for us to speak thus of something being absolutely necessary for God. "After all," someone might object, "who are we to tell God what he can or must do?" But this is not the way in which this statement is made. Obviously we cannot tell God to be or do anything. Yet he has revealed something of his nature in Scripture, and it is not impudent or improper to inquire on the basis of that revelation whether God can or cannot do a thing, particularly when it is as central to the Christian faith as the atonement. For example, is it possible for God to lie or speak falsehood? If we answer no, as we should, we are not limiting God by telling what he can or cannot do. We are simply acknowledging that deceit is impossible for one who is characterized by utter truth, as God declares himself to be. Far from dishonoring him in this, we actually honor him. Moreover, we are led to a valuable conclusion; for, on the basis of God's inability to lie, we perceive that he can always be trusted.

It is not improper or even impractical to conclude that God was under an absolute necessity in the matter of Christ's death. He may not have been. But the answer to whether he was or not is to be determined solely by the teaching of the Scripture and not by any prior conclusions as to what is required by our understanding of God's freedom.

The Divine Necessities

When we turn to the Bible we find a number of necessities pertaining to God which bear upon our subject. They are like the necessity for God to speak truth, being Truth, but they relate primarily to the matter of salvation.

The first of these necessities is the *hatred of God for sin,* which we may express by saying that God must hate sin if he is to be as he declares himself to be in Scripture. The background for this necessity is the holiness of God. In Scripture God is more often called holy than anything else.

This is the epithet most often affixed to his name, for instance. We do not often read of his "loving name," "mighty name," or "eternal name." But we are often reminded of his "holy name." Moreover, this is the

attribute of God which is invariably mentioned in any vision men have of him. Isaiah, in his great vision of the Lord "high and lifted up," stressed the holiness of God more than any other attribute. "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty," cry the seraphim. Isaiah's immediate reaction was to bemoan his own sinful condition: "Woe is me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty" (Isa. 6:5; cf. vv. 1-6).

The holiness of God lies at the core of his being, then, and the dismay of Isaiah was the recognition that in his holiness God cannot be indifferent to anything which opposes it. Holiness involves the elements of majesty and will. When we ask, "What is that will primarily set on?" the answer is: God's majesty. Thus, God's will is inevitably directed against anything which would attempt to diminish that majesty or flaunt it. That is what sin tries to do. So God is against sin; he is wrath toward it.

Many people today do not like the idea of wrath. But like it or not, Scripture teaches that it is a necessary aspect of God's nature in relation to sin. The Old Testament alone has nearly six hundred important passages concerning God's wrath. His wrath is directed against injustice, corruption, and offenses against his own glory and majesty. The New Testament has equally important passages. Romans 1, for example, speaks of God's wrath revealed "against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness" (v. 18). Other passages speak boldly of "the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10; 2:16; cf. 5:9; Rom. 2:5). The teaching of these passages is that God will not and cannot look with indifference upon the unrighteous.

A second necessity of the divine nature relating to the matter of salvation is the obligation of God to do right. This obligation is based upon God's role as ruler and judge of creation. "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" asked Abraham rhetorically on the occasion of God's revelation to him of the pending judgment of Sodom (Gen. 18:25). The answer was obvious: the Sovereign must do right. In fact, Abraham used this necessity to plead for the salvation of Sodom. God

had told Abraham that he would destroy Sodom, and Abraham remonstrated, "Will you destroy the righteous with the wicked? Sup pose there are fifty righteous within the city: will you also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are in it? Far be it from you to do this, to slay the righteous with the wicked. Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Here are two divine necessities pertaining to salvation: first, that God must hate sin, and second, that the Judge of the earth must do right. What is right where sin is concerned? The answer is judgment, as the destruction of Sodom indicates. True, we do not see the fullness of that judgment now, for God has largely withheld his judgment. Yet it must come. It must come later if not sooner; and when it comes, it must result in the eternal destruction of the sinner.

The Divine Solution

We know from the biblical record that God elected not to destroy every sinner. Out of his great love he decided to elect a great company to salvation. But the question arises: How can he do this without violating these two necessities of his very nature? How can he save those who actually deserve his just judgment? There is only one way: another must suffer the judgment in place of those who stand condemned. We hear that answer, and we are momentarily relieved. But then we ask, "Who?" and despair settles on us once again. Who is equal to such a task? Who is willing to do it? The answer is: God's own Son; the only One both able and willing to become man and to die for sinners.

Anselm, whom we mentioned earlier, put it like this: First, he said, salvation had to be achieved by God, for no one else could achieve it. Certainly men and women could not achieve it, for we are the ones who have gotten ourselves into trouble in the first place. We have done so by our rebellion against God's just law and decrees. Moreover, we have suffered from the effects of sin to such a degree that even our will is bound, and therefore we cannot even choose to please God, let alone actually please him. Our only hope is God, who alone has both the will and power to save. Second, said Anselm, apparently contradicting this

first point, salvation must also be achieved by man, for man is the one who has wronged God and must therefore make the wrong right. Given this situation, salvation can be achieved only by one who is both God and man, that is, Jesus.

Anselm put the argument in these words: "It would not have been right for the restoration of human nature to be left undone, and ... it could not have been done unless man paid what was owing to God for sin. But the debt was so great that, while man alone owed it, only God could pay it, so that the same person must be both man and God. Thus it was necessary for God to take manhood into the unity of his person, so that he who in his own nature ought to pay and could not should be in a person who could. ...The life of this man was so sublime, so precious, that it can suffice to pay what is owing for the sins of the whole world, and infinitely more."

Only thus was it possible for God to be both 'just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). This is the ultimate necessity indicated in those well-known verses in John's Gospel. "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (3:14-17). These verses say that apart from the death of Christ and faith in him, the race is lost. Given the desire of God to save us, there was just no other option.

Curse of the Cross

Yet there is still one matter. At the start of this chapter we asked, "Why was it necessary for the love of God to achieve its end in this way? Why Jesus? And why the cross?" Thus far we have answered the first half of that question; we have seen why it was necessary for the price of our salvation to be paid by Jesus. But we still have not answered why that sacrifice had to be made on Calvary. Why this death? Why this particularly horrible form of suffering?

The answer to that question is given in the Book of Galatians, in which Paul says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us; for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'" (Gal. 3:13). What does this mean? Well, it is the Bible's answer to an objection to God's way of salvation that we might still make even after we have understood the nature and necessity of the atonement. We might understand that Jesus was the innocent Son of God and that he was therefore the only One who could take our place on Calvary, the just for the unjust. We might understand that God judged him in our place. "But that is still not right," we might argue. "Even if Jesus died willingly, it was still not right for God to punish one who was innocent of all wrongdoing." At this point Paul's answer comes in, for he points out that in the Old Testament there is a verse (Deut. 21:23) that pronounces a curse on anyone hanged on a tree as a means of execution. This may not have meant much to those who lived in that day, but it was part of the law of Israel. Thus, when the Lord Jesus Christ was taken and hanged on a tree, he thereby became a technical violator of the whole law (though through no fault of his own) and could be justly punished. In this way God remained just in his execution of Christ, and Christ remained innocent.

God's Love Commended

The conclusion to this study is that the achievement of our salvation at such cost flows from the love of God and that the love of God is thereby commended to us so that we might believe on Jesus. To save us it was necessary to pay this cost. Yet God did not hesitate to provide the sacrifice of his Son, so great was his love for us. Can we despise that love? Can we ignore it? The Bible says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

This, of course, is the bottom line of the entire discussion, and it is this that makes it meaningful. Our discussion of the necessity of the atonement has involved us in some careful theological distinctions, and some of this is admittedly difficult for some people, for not all are

theologians. Yet the bottom line is not difficult at all. Let me put it like this. The week before I first preached this material in my regular exposition of John on Sunday mornings at Tenth Presbyterian Church, I was discussing these themes at the dinner table to see how the people who were there would react to them. They did very well. But at the end a ten-year-old friend of one of my daughters asked, "What is the main point of your sermon?" It was a question her parents had been teaching her to ask so she could follow the messages better, and (I think) she wanted to get a head start. I replied that the answer was a simple one; for although the theology is difficult, the point itself is not. It is simply this:

There was no other
good enough To
pay the price of sin;
He only could
unlock the gate
Of heav'n and let
us in.
O dearly, dearly has
He loved! And we
must love Him too,
And trust in His
redeeming blood, And
try His works to do.

Christ has loved us so much that he did not hold back from doing what needed to be done. Because of this we, on our part, should serve him without reservation.

Chapter 250.
"It Is Finished"

John 19:30

One of the goals of Greek oratory, to which the Greek language generally lends itself, is to say much in few words—"to give a sea of matter in a drop of language." That goal is reached in the sixth of Christ's sayings from the cross: "It is finished!" In English this is only three words, in Greek just one. Yet this word sums up the greatest work that has ever been done. Spurgeon said, "It would need all the other words that ever were spoken, or ever can be spoken, to explain this one word. It is altogether immeasurable. It is high; I cannot attain to it. It is deep; I cannot fathom it."

We have been trying to study it, however, and to that end we have looked at, first, the nature and, second, the necessity of the atonement. In this chapter we deal with its perfection, the aspect of Christ's death that is perhaps more directly suggested by this word than any other.

Pink writes, "This was not the despairing cry of a helpless martyr; it was not an expression of satisfaction that the termination of his sufferings was now reached; it was not the last gasp of a worn-out life. No, rather was it the declaration on the part of the Divine Redeemer that all for which he came from heaven to earth to do, was now done; that all that was needed to reveal the full character of God had now been accomplished; that all that was required by the law before sinners could be saved had now been performed; that the full price of our redemption was now paid." To be sure, as Jesus spoke these words he was not yet dead. But his death was only moments away, and in any case he here speaks anticipatively of the work now done.

What did this dying utterance of the Lord mean? What was finished? How does this relate to us and our salvation?

Christ's Work Done

There are a number of things we can point to as having been finished in the moment of Christ's death. The first and most obvious one is *Christ's sufferings.* These had not taken him by surprise. Long before this the Lord had said, "I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!" (Luke 12:50). Centuries before, Isaiah had

written of him, "He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isa. 53:3). Suffering marked Christ's life. He had thirsted and hungered. He had ministered for three years without even a place to lay his head. He was scorned, accused, beaten, and now subjected to the horror and indignities of the cross.

No one ever suffered as Jesus did. Yet now it is finished. No snarling enemies will spit in his face again. No soldiers will ever scourge him again. No priests will mock him. It is finished; he sits on heaven's throne, waiting until all his enemies are made his footstool. Spurgeon wrote: "Now Judas, come and betray him with a kiss! What, man, dare you not do it? Come, Pilate, and wash your hands in pretended innocency, and say now that you are guiltless of his blood! Come, ye scribes and Pharisees, and accuse him; and oh, ye Jewish mob and Gentile rabble, newly-risen from the grave, shout now, 'Away with him! Crucify him!' But see! they flee from him; they cry to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne!' Yet that is the face that was more marred than any man's, the face of him whom they once despised and rejected."

The head that once was
crowned with thorns Is
crowned with glory now;
A royal diadem
adorns The
mighty
Victor's brow.
The highest place that
heav'n affords Is his,
is his by right,
The King of kings, and
Lord of lords, And
heav'n's eternal Light.

How glad we must be that none can despise him, that the sufferings of which the Savior's life were once full are finished.

The second thing we can point to as finished in the moment of our Lord's death was *his work,* that which he had been sent into the world to do. This work centered in the atonement, which we will come to in a moment, but it was more than this. It was also his entire life, undergirded by his utter obedience to the Father and filled with teachings and good works. This work was before him constantly. We are told by the author of Hebrews that on the occasion of his coming into the world he said, "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God'" (Heb. 10:5-7). In John 4:34 we read, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." He spoke of the works that God had given him to do (John 5:36) and of the words that God had given him to speak (John 8:26; 14:24). He said, "The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work" (John 14:10). Then, in his great high priestly prayer recorded in John 17, he said, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (v. 4).

Throughout his lifetime Jesus had this work in mind, and he devoted himself to doing it. Now it is done, and he points with satisfaction: "It is finished!" None of us can say that fully of our work, but Jesus said it of his. His work was done perfectly.

The third area to which these words apply is *the prophecies of his first coming.* We cannot say that all the prophecies concerning the Lord are finished, for some pertain to work he is yet to do—at his second coming. But those that refer to his Gospel ministry are finished. In fact, it is in direct connection with one such prophecy that these words were spoken. Psalm 69:21 speaks of vinegar being given to the dying Messiah in his thirst. So Jesus, noticing that this had not been fulfilled, said, "I thirst," and thus provoked its fulfillment as soldiers rushed to offer him a vinegar-wine solution. Immediately afterward we read, "When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished'" (John 19:30).

It had been prophesied that the Messiah was to be born of a woman without benefit of a human father (Isa. 7:14; Gal. 4:4). This was completed. It had been foretold that he was to be the seed of Abraham and of the line of David (Gen. 22:18; 2 Sam. 7:12-13), that he should be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), and he was so born. Old Testament writers had spoken of his flight into Egypt and a subsequent return to his own land (Hosea 11:1; cf. Isa. 49:3, 6). It so happened. Christ's appearance was to be preceded by that of one like Elijah (Mal. 3:1). John the Baptist filled this role. Christ's miracles were foretold—that "the eyes of the blind" should be opened, "the ears of the deaf' unstopped, "the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing" (Isa. 35:5-6). Jesus performed all these miracles. His triumphal entry into Jerusalem had been foretold (Zech. 9:9). He was to be hated (Ps. 69:4) and rejected by his own people (Isa. 8:14). A friend would betray him (Ps. 41:9). He was to be numbered with the transgressors (Isa. 53:12), pierced through hands and feet (Ps. 22:16). Soldiers were to divide his garments and cast lots for his outer cloak (Ps. 22:18). All this had been completed. There was nothing of all that had been written of him that was left undone.

Moreover, this is not just a conclusion based on our own imperfect knowledge of the Old Testament texts. This is the teaching of Scripture itself. Three times in Scripture the very word that is used in John 19:30, translated "it is finished" (*teleō*), is used of this fulfillment. Luke 18:31 —'Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will *be fulfilled.'"* Luke 22:37— "I tell you that this must be *fulfilled* in me." Acts 13:29—"When they had *carried out* all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead."

Certainly, nothing that was to be fulfilled in the life and ministry of the Messiah was left lacking in Jesus.

A Perfect Atonement

Having said all this, we must nevertheless add that the primary reference of these words is to *the atonement.* This was the acme of his sufferings, the chief of his works, and the primary focus of the prophecies. Moreover, this has major doctrinal significance; for if the work of the atonement is finished, then salvation is secured for us by God and there is nothing that we can add or hope to add to it. Indeed, we dare not attempt to add anything if we would be saved.

This is the point of the atonement that has always figured prominently in Protestant presentations of the meaning of the death of Christ, as over against Roman Catholic theology. The Roman church (and many unsound protestant churches too, for that matter) maintains that the death of Christ does not relieve the believer in Christ of making satisfaction for sins he has committed.

More precisely, it distinguishes between sins committed before and after baptism, and between temporal and eternal punishment for those sins. So far as sins committed before baptism are concerned, both the temporal and eternal punishment are blotted out through the application of the benefits of Christ's death to the individual through the baptismal rite. So far as sins committed after baptism are concerned, the eternal punishments are blotted out. But the temporal punishments require the making of satisfaction by the individual himself either in this life (through a faithful use of the sacraments and by a meritorious life) or else in purgatory. While this system of salvation allows the greater part of the work to be God's and even acknowledges that the faithfulness and merit of the believer are attained only through the prevenient grace of God, it nevertheless requires the individual to contribute to his own salvation in some measure. So it is not possible to say that the work of Christ is finished. More is needed. This outlook is evident in the Mass, in which the sacrifice of Christ is reenacted constantly.

Thus, Protestant thought has always contended rightly that "the satisfaction of Christ is the only satisfaction for sin and is so perfect and final that it leaves no penal liability for any sin of the believer." True, the believer often experiences chastisement for sins done in this life (though never in full measure to what he has deserved). But this is not

satisfaction. It is discipline only; it is given to help us grow. Even in times of severe chastisement it is still true that "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

This is the burden of the Book of Hebrews, to give just one other biblical example. For, having demonstrated the uniqueness of Christ's person, office, and mission, the author of that book states, "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (Heb. 10:12-14). What can be clearer than that? What can be greater? "From whatever angle we look upon his sacrifice we find its uniqueness to be as inviolable as the uniqueness of his person, of his mission, and of his office. Who is God-man but he alone? Who is great high priest to offer such sacrifice but he alone? Who shed such vicarious blood but he alone? Who entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption, but he alone?" In light of those qualities and achievement it is arrogant to think that we can add anything.

> Jesus paid it all,
> All to him I owe;
> Sin had left a crimson stain; He washed it white as snow.

"But then, what is left for us to do?" someone asks. Nothing but to believe in God's Word and trust Jesus! Jesus himself said it. When some of the Galileans asked him on the occasion of his multiplication of the loaves and fish, "What must we do to do works of God? "Jesus replied, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (John 6:28-29).

Pink tells a story that may be helpful in this regard. A Christian farmer, deeply concerned over an unsaved neighbor, who was a carpenter, was trying to explain the gospel, especially the sufficiency of the finished

work of Christ. But the carpenter persisted in believing that he had to do something himself. One day the farmer asked his friend to make a gate for him, and when it was finished he came for it and carried it away in his wagon. He hung it on a fence in his field and then arranged for the carpenter to stop by and see that it was hung properly. The carpenter came. But when he arrived he was surprised to see the farmer standing by with a sharp axe in his hand. "What is that for?" he asked.

"I'm going to add a few strokes to your work," was the answer.

"But there's no need to do that," the carpenter protested. "The gate is perfect as it is. I did everything that was necessary." The farmer took his axe and began to strike the gate anyway, keeping at it until in a short while it was ruined. "Look what you've done," cried the carpenter.
"You've ruined my work!"

"Yes," said his friend. "And that is exactly what you are trying to do. You are trying to ruin the work of Christ by your own miserable additions to it." God used this lesson to show the carpenter his mistake, and he was led to cast himself upon what Christ had done for him.

What Work for Jesus?

Yet I must not leave the impression that, having believed on Christ, there is then nothing for the Christian to do or that his conduct after he has become a believer in Christ does not matter. Let us say clearly that nothing we have done or ever will do can enter into the satisfaction that Christ made on the cross. His work is perfect; the atonement is done. But what do we say in that case?
Do we say, "Well, if Christ has finished it, I will fold my hands and do nothing"? Not at all! Rather do we say, "If Jesus has finished such a great work for me, tell me quickly what work I can do for him."

Do we need a biblical example? We find one in Saul of Tarsus. When he was struck down on the road to Damascus, his first question concerned the identity of the One who was revealing himself to him. He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" But as soon as he had learned the answer—"I am

Jesus, whom you persecute"—and had believed on the One who spoke, Paul's next question was: "Lord, what do you want me to do?" (Acts 9:5-6). Christ had a work for him to do. He was to be an apostle to bear the name of Christ "before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (v. 15).

This will not necessarily be your task. You are not an apostle, nor am I. But we each have a work to do. If we have been put in this world by Jesus and have not yet been taken home to be with him, we may be certain that we have not yet finished that work. So get on with it. Did he finish his work? Then you and I must finish our work too. Of course, there are discouragements. Of course, there is suffering and weakness and disappointment. But we must not give in to these. We must keep on until that moment when we, upon our deathbed, can say as did Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day— and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

I leave you this challenge from the pen of Spurgeon: "As long as there is breath in our bodies, let us serve Christ; as long as we can think, as long as we can speak, as long as we can work, let us serve him, let us serve him with our last gasp; and, if it be possible, let us try to set some work going that will glorify him when we are dead and gone."

Chapter 251.
For Whom Did Christ Die?

John 19:30

For whom did Christ die? Did he die for all human beings, and thus all will be saved (the view of universalism)? Did he die for all, but, for whatever reason, not all will be saved (the view of Arminianism)? Or did he die only for certain individuals, all of whom will be saved (the view of Calvinism)? Each of these views involves problems, so that

many people would rather not deal with the question. But we cannot avoid it, at least in this series of studies. It is an area of the atonement with which theology has always dealt. Besides, it is suggested by our text and by the gospel. Our text contains Christ's sixth cry from the cross, "It is finished." But what was finished? In our last study we answered that it was, above all, the atonement. But what was the atonement? Was it the actual payment of the price for the sins of some or of all people, as the result of which they are saved? Or was it potential atonement only, that is, something that makes it possible for people to be saved but that in itself saves no one?

The Gospel of John gives us the most difficult answer, for it (perhaps more than any other
Gospel) presents that view of Christ's work generally known as "limited atonement." We think of John 10, in which Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life *for the sheep"* (v. 11). A few verses later he explicitly excludes certain of his hearers from that number—"You are not my sheep" (v. 26). Similarly, in John 17 the Lord explicitly prays for those *"you have given me,"* a phrase repeated six times with only slight variations. This phrase does not include everyone because those who have been given to Christ are carefully distinguished from "the world" (vv. 6, 9, 11-18).

It would be easier to skip this subject; but as in the matter of the necessity of the atonement, we would do so to our own hurt. Actually the subject is important and profitable; for what is at stake is nothing other than the nature of the atonement itself, as we will see when we study it.

"The World" and "All Men"

But first we must deal with a primary matter. This is the view that the whole discussion is wrongheaded simply because, so it is said, the Bible gives a clear answer to the question. Is it not true, one might ask, that the Bible often uses universal terms when speaking of Jesus' death? Take Isaiah 53:6. It says, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the

iniquity of *us all.*" Does this not say that all have sinned and that it is for these, all of them, that Christ died? Again, there is Hebrews 2:9, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death *for everyone.*" Or perhaps 1 John 2:2, which seems even more unmistakable. "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of *the whole world."* Do these verses not teach unambiguously that Jesus died for everyone?

Not necessarily. The reason this is not necessarily the case is that the Bible habitually uses these terms in less than an inclusivistic sense. For instance, the word "world" is sometimes used of the whole fabric of heaven and earth (Job 34:13). Sometimes it refers only to the earth (Ps. 24:1; 98:7), or only to the heavens (Ps. 90:2). There are texts in which it does mean every single human being (Rom. 3:6, 19). But again, it sometimes refers only to one large group (Matt. 18:7; John 4:42; 1 Cor. 4:9; Rev. 13:3). This last is probably the dominant meaning, just as it is in our use of the same word in English. To give an example, when the Pharisees say among themselves, "Look how the world has gone after him" (John 12:19), meaning Christ, they do not mean every person on earth or even every person in Israel. They only mean a very large group of the citizens of Jerusalem. If we insist that "world" always means "every human being," we are going to have trouble explaining how under Caesar Augustus "all the world" went to be taxed. Did everyone go—barbarians, prisoners, slaves, or others outside the Roman sphere of influence?

The point we are making is that the use of words like "all men," "the whole world," and "us all" does not in itself settle the matter. Rather, the meaning of each phrase must be determined from the context. Thus, in the case of Isaiah 53:6, it can be argued very cogently that the passage is written of God's people, all of whom certainly have gone astray (which is also true of those who are not God's people) and have been redeemed (which is not true of those who are not God's people). Similarly, in Hebrews 2:9, the reference is to the "many sons" who shall be brought to glory, as specified in the very next verse. Believers in

particular redemption have usually explained 1 John 2:2 in terms of John's emphasis in writing. He is trying to show that the propitiation Christ made was not for Jews only, which might be expected, but for Gentiles as well.

The point here is not whether this particular interpretation of these verses is the correct one, though I believe it is. The point is only that they *may* be so interpreted. Consequently, the matter of limited versus unlimited atonement must be resolved on other grounds.

The Central Question

The central question in this entire discussion is not how many verses may be lined up on one side or the other or even whether or not Christ's death has sufficient value to atone for the sins of the world. The answer to the last question is obvious: Christ's death has sufficient value to atone not only for a million worlds such as ours but more besides. The question is only: Did Christ's death actually atone for the sins of anyone? Did it actually propitiate the wrath of God toward any specific group of individuals? Did it actually reconcile any single person to God? Did it redeem anyone? If it did, whom? When the question is asked in this way we can see that there are only three possible answers:

1. Christ's death was not an actual atonement but rather that which makes atonement possible. It becomes actual when the sinner repents of sin and believes on Jesus.
2. It was an actual atonement for the sins of God's elect, with the result that these are saved.
3. It was an actual atonement for the sins of all human beings, so that all are saved.

We can dismiss the third possibility immediately, for the Bible clearly teaches that not all human beings are saved and conversely that some specifically are lost. Pharaoh is an example. So is Judas. So is the rich man in Christ's parable of the rich man and Lazarus. In Revelation we have descriptions of God's final judgment on such persons. With this

possibility eliminated, the choice is between numbers one and two—an actual atonement for the specific sins of the elect and an indefinite atonement for no sins in particular. What, then, is the way in which the Bible speaks of Christ's sacrifice?

The answer has already been given in our earlier studies. We talked of sacrifice and substitution, and the point was that Christ actually became a sacrifice and substitute on the basis of which those who were appointed to salvation were saved. We talked of propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption. Each of these points to a specific aspect of that which Christ accomplished. Christ did not come to make propitiation possible; he came to propitiate God's wrath against sin. He did not come to make reconciliation possible; he came to make reconciliation. He did not come to make redemption possible; his shed blood was the price of redemption.

John Murray poses the issue like this: "The very nature of Christ's mission and accomplishment is involved in this question. Did Christ come to make the salvation of all men possible, to remove obstacles that stood in the way of salvation, and merely to make provision for salvation? Or did he come to secure the salvation of all those who are ordained to eternal life? Did he come to make men redeemable? Or did he come effectually and infallibly to redeem? The doctrine of the Atonement must be radically revised if, as atonement, it applies to those who finally perish as well as to those who are the heirs of eternal life. In that event we should have to dilute the grand categories in terms of which the Scripture defines the Atonement and deprive them of their most precious import and glory. This we cannot do. The saving efficacy of expiation, propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption is too deeply embedded in these concepts, and we dare not eliminate this efficacy. We do well to ponder the words of our Lord himself: 'I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that of everything which he hath given to me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up in the last day' (John 6:38-39). Security inheres in Christ's redemptive accomplishment. And this means that, in respect of the persons

contemplated, design and accomplishment and final realization have all the same extent."

This is called "limited atonement." But this is not a good designation, for all theologians limit it in one way or another. The Calvinist limits its scope. The Arminian limits its power. The question is rather: How does the Bible portray Christ's sacrifice? The answer is that it is portrayed as actually accomplishing that for which God ordained it. It is because it was actual that Christ looked upon "the suffering of his soul" and was "satisfied" (Isa. 53:11).

Belief and Unbelief

I can see only one possible way of avoiding this conclusion, and even that is not actually a possibility when it is once examined. It may be argued by someone that the atonement is actual and also for the sins of the whole world but that all are not saved, not because their sins are not atoned for, but because they do not believe in Christ and hence will not accept the gospel. "It is like a gift," the person might say. "It has been selected and paid for, but no one can be forced to take a gift. The world has been saved, but many persons will not be saved simply because they do not believe in Jesus."

Does that sound reasonable? It does until you ask about the nature of unbelief. Is it merely the morally neutral choice of deciding not to accept salvation? Or is it a sin? The answer is: a sin. In fact, it is the most damning of all sins. And this means simply that if Christ died for all sin and if this includes even the sin of unbelief (as it must if he truly died for *all* sin), then all are saved whether they respond to the gospel or not. Pharaoh, Judas, Muslims, Hindus, pagans will all be in heaven. John Owen, the greatest of the Puritan theologians, who did for this doctrine what Anselm did for the necessity of the atonement, wrote: "You will say, 'Because of their unbelief; they will not believe.' But this unbelief, is it a sin, or not? If not, why should they be punished for it? If it be, then Christ underwent the punishment due to it, or not. If so, then why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which he died from partaking of the fruit of his death? If he did not, then did he not die for all their sins. Let them choose which part they will." If Jesus

died for all the sin of the whole human race, unbelief included, then all are saved, which the Bible denies. If he died for all the sin of the race, unbelief excluded, then he did not die for all the sins of anyone and all must be condemned. The only viable position is that he died for the sin of the elect only.

And, of course, this is what the Bible teaches.

Matthew 1:21—"You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save *his people* from their sins."

Matthew 20:28—"The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for *many.*"

John 13:1—"It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed *them* the full extent of his love."

Galatians 3:13—"Christ redeemed *us* from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for *us."*

Ephesians 5:25—"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the *church* and gave himself up for her."

Romans 8:28-32—"And we know that in all things God works for the good of *those who love him,* who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for *us* all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give *us* all things?"

Repent and Believe the Gospel

Some will argue that if Christ did not take away the sins of all the world, then it is not possible for Christians to offer salvation to all

indiscriminately. In fact, it is not possible to offer salvation to anyone, since we do not know whether the person is one for whom Christ died.

There are two answers. First, we are to offer salvation to everyone because we are told to do it and because we have ample biblical examples to that effect. We must say as Ezekiel, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11). Or as Isaiah, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat" (Isa. 55:1). Or as Jesus, "Come to me, all you who are weary and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). This is our great commandment and pattern.

The second answer is that, strictly speaking, the gospel is not so much an offer that people may politely accept or refuse according to their own pleasure as it is a command to turn from sin to Jesus. We have gotten into the habit of making the gospel into an offer because this is more socially acceptable in our culture, and God clearly uses our culturally conditioned efforts. But strictly speaking, the gospel is not something lying around for people to take or leave as they choose. They are called to repent. We are to call them. Only after they repent and turn to Christ can we know that they are those for whom Christ died.

Spurgeon was a great Calvinist. He believed in limited atonement. But it did not stop him from being one of the most effective evangelists of his age. He did not lie; he did not say, "Because you all are elect, Christ died for you." It was enough to say, "You are a sinner, and Jesus died for sinners just like you and me. If you would be saved, repent and believe the gospel."

God honors truth. Therefore, we will speak the truth. And what a wonderful truth this is! We proclaim not a mere possibility of salvation, but salvation itself. We preach that Jesus died for his people. He actually died in their place. He propitiated the wrath of God for them. He reconciled them to God. He redeemed them from the terrible

bondage of their own guilt and wickedness. He is therefore a sufficient and suitable Savior. If he is your Savior, you will certainly come to him. Will you not come now? Do not say, "But I am not one of the elect." You do not know that. Just come to Jesus. Jesus has done everything necessary to save sinners. Are you a sinner? Then come to Jesus. He is the Savior. Come!

Chapter 252.
Christ's Side Pierced

John 19:31-37

We have noted a strange irony in the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus: the leaders were adhering to the minutest requirements of their law while breaking its intent in hounding an innocent man to death. They would try for the open formality of two trials and an official condemnation, but they would break scores of legal safeguards and would even neglect to hear a defense for the accused. They would refuse to enter into Pilate's judgment hall lest they be defiled and be unfit to eat the Passover, but they would defile themselves with the blood of the true Passover, Jesus Christ.

"Religious scruples may live in a dead conscience," said Spurgeon. Indeed they may. In fact, they may live for a long, long time. In the incident recorded in these verses, from the moments immediately following the death of Christ, we see the same principles operating.

It was the custom of the Romans, like the Carthaginians and Persians before them, to leave the body of the crucified upon the cross to rot and be devoured by birds. But in Palestine, where many things were governed by Mosaic rather than Roman law, victims were allowed to be buried. The law said, "If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the

Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance" (Deut. 21:22-23). Moreover, the law said that executions were not to take place on a religious feast day, which the Passover was. In respect for these laws (though they had shown little enough respect for the Lawgiver), the religious leaders now came to Pilate, requesting that the legs of the victims be broken to hasten their deaths. When his legs were broken, the crucified man could no longer press down with his feet in order to hoist himself upward and thus relieve the pressure on his diaphragm, and he would die quickly by suffocation.

Pilate did not care for the bodies, of course. So he granted the leaders' wishes. On his order soldiers were dispatched to break the legs of the three sufferers. The legs of the thieves were broken, but when the soldiers came to Jesus they discovered that he had already died and so did not break his legs. Instead, one of them thrust a spear into his side, presumably to make sure that he really was dead, as a result of which blood and water came forth. In these verses the writer of the Gospel records these facts, indicating that they occurred in fulfillment of the Scriptures. He draws special attention to the issue of blood and water, saying that "the man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe" (v. 35).

Who Is the Witness?

This verse, in which the testimony of an eyewitness is appealed to, has puzzled commentators. The difficulty is due to that fact that the witness is not specifically identified and that it is not even possible to say for certain whether one or two individuals are involved.

Three interpretations are possible. First, the writer may be referring to himself as an eyewitness of the events he describes. Second, he may be distinguishing between himself as the author and a second party who is the witness. In that case he would be saying that the testimony of the witness is authentic or genuine (*alēthinos*), and that he, the author, can confirm that it is true (*alēthēs*). The third possibility is that the author is calling God to witness, presumably because the fact that he is recording

was observed by only one individual. Moffat captures this meaning in his version, for it reads, "He who saw it has borne witness (his witness is true; God knows he is telling the truth), that you may believe." Some scholars, represented by Erasmus first and by Bultmann at the present time, vary this slightly by suggesting that the second personality is Christ.

What can be said for these views? Any one of them is possible, but the balance of evidence is probably in support of the first: that the reference in both cases is to the eyewitness, who must in turn be identified as the beloved disciple and the author of the Gospel.

It is difficult to see how the identity of the witness as the beloved disciple would have been denied at all were scholars not at one time looking for arguments to show that the apostle John was not the author of the Gospel that bears his name. To begin with, the beloved disciple has just been mentioned as being present at the cross, for it was into the keeping of this one that Jesus entrusted his mother (vv. 26-27). Again, John is the only disciple of the Twelve who is mentioned as being at the cross; he is referred to on several occasions throughout the narrative of these last hours (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20) and is likely the unnamed disciple who secured Peter's admission to the court of the high priest. The two appear together again in John 20 and
21. So far as 19:35 is concerned, it is significant that the way of referring to the witness here is directly parallel to the last verses of the Gospel in which the "disciple whom Jesus loved" is identified as "the disciple who testifies to these things" (21:24). There is no reason to reject the further conclusion that this same disciple is also the apostle John; for on two occasions at least the beloved disciple must be identified as one of the Twelve (in the account of the Last Supper and in the closing event of chapter 21), and his close association with Peter as well as the fact that the apostle John is unmentioned by name anywhere else in the Gospel more than suggests the identification.

Some have thought it strange that, having introduced himself into the narrative in this way, the author should then add "and he knows that he tells the truth." But it is not really strange. The author (if he is John,

Zebedee's son) has already been presented as a historical figure present at the crucifixion: thus, there is now every reason for him to draw attention to himself in this capacity. If this is his concern, it is possible that the solemnity with which he writes may be due, not primarily to any supposed mystical or sacramental significance of the blood and water, though it may include it, but to the fact that he can produce only one witness. He knows that normally it is on the testimony of two or three witnesses that a truth is established (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15; cf. John 8:13-18).

Blood and Water

But why should this particular incident receive the attention it does? Indeed, why should it be emphasized at all? The death of Jesus, the central point of the Gospel, has been recorded in just one verse entirely without editorial comment on John's part. Now a seemingly minor matter, the fact that the legs of Jesus were not broken and that blood and water flowed from his side when pierced, receives "disproportionate" attention. We can be sure that the emphasis is for some good reason, even though we may not know what it is. Moreover, we can be sure that it is profitable for us to examine these verses and search the meaning out.

Let me suggest three interpretations of the blood and water that I do not consider to be the right emphases and then suggest four important meanings from which we can learn.

One wrong meaning, which is nevertheless quite popular today, is that the issue of blood and water from Christ's side signifies the two sacraments. No less weighty a scholar than Oscar Cullmann has forcefully argued this. But it is not convincing. In addition to the fact that John does not really use the words "blood" and "water" in this way (though Cullmann thinks he does), it is a rather fatal defect in this interpretation that the early church did not use "water" to mean "baptism" or "blood" to signify "the Lord's Supper." This is an

interpretation that arises from the perfectly understandable concerns of sacramentalists, but it is not really suggested by the Gospel.

A second wrongheaded approach is that which sees the incident mystically. That is, as Eve issued from the side of Adam, so the church issues from the side of Christ, the second Adam. That may have homiletical or devotional value, but that is not what John meant.

A third approach, which has had much popularity among certain groups of evangelicals but which I still believe to be mistaken, is medical. Over a hundred years ago a doctor in England by the name of William Stroud published a book entitled *A Treatise on the Physical Cause of the Death of Christ.* He argued that Jesus' death was due to a ruptured or broken heart. Such a condition may be caused by great mental agony, he argued. He said that it "is usually attended with immediate death, and with an effusion into the pericardium (the capsule containing the heart) of the blood previously circulating through that organ; which when thus extravasated, although scarcely in any other case, separates into its constituent parts, so as to present the appearance commonly termed blood and water." The trouble with this is not the validity of the explanation of how "blood and water" actually issued from Christ, though other doctors have questioned Stroud's thesis, but that the event has no meaning as Stroud explains it. The appeal of the explanation is the suggestion that Jesus died of a "broken heart." But that is not how Jesus died, according to the Gospel accounts. He died triumphantly, having dismissed his spirit. Moreover, even if the dismissal of his spirit might be assumed to have been effected by what we call a coronary thrombosis, this medical fact would be unknown to John and is therefore obviously not the reason why he has recorded it so solemnly in his narrative.

The Essential Points

Why did John record this incident? I would suggest that it was for any or all of the following reasons, each of which is suggested by the text itself or by other important New Testament passages.

1. The entire unfolding of events (which, we must remember, involved the failure of the soldiers to break the legs of Jesus as well as the piercing of his side by a spear) testified beyond any doubt that *Jesus was really dead.* The breaking of the legs was to hasten death, as John indicates. The only reason Jesus' legs were not broken was that he was already dead. But lest there be any doubt, the spear was thrust into his side by the soldier—all carefully recorded by the witness. Why was this important? It was important in view of the later claims regarding the resurrection. Jesus had not merely swooned to revive later in the cool of the tomb and then emerge to appear to his disciples as if he had been raised from the dead. He had really died, and he was really resurrected. This was one reason why the details were important. But they were also important in view of Gnostic teachings that had begun to infiltrate the church by the time of John's writing. The Gnostics denied that Jesus was a real man and possessed a real body. This incident proves the Gnostics wrong and shows by contrast that Jesus actually tasted death for us.

We have it in our creeds. One of the earliest Christian creeds is found in 1 Corinthians: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried..." (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Similarly, the Apostles' Creed affirms that Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried." The gospel includes a real death for sin and also a real resurrection.

2. The events John records mark *the fulfillment of Scripture.* If we look at the verses at face value, we can hardly miss seeing that it is this that John emphasizes. It was a remarkable fulfillment of Scripture too, because it was complicated and improbable. There were two prophecies involved: Psalm 34:20 ("He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken") and Zechariah 12:10 ("They will look on me, the one whom they have pierced"). One was negative; the other was positive. The one said that the Savior's bones must not be broken; the other said that the Savior must be

pierced. Moreover, it was the exact opposite of these two prophecies that the soldiers set out to fulfill. They had come to break Jesus' legs along with the legs of the two thieves, and they had no intention at all of piercing him with the spear. Yet they ended up fulfilling the prophecies. How can brutal men be kept from one act of violence, for which they had specific commandment, and be led to enact another for which they had no commandment? There is only one answer. By overruling circumstances, the God who inspired the prophecies made sure that they were fulfilled.

Will he not do so with all the prophecies of his Word, including those that involve us for whom Christ died? Then let us trust God's Word. Spurgeon wrote, "That our Lord's bones should remain unbroken, and yet that he should be pierced, seemed a very unlikely thing; but it was carried out. When next you meet with an unlikely promise, believe it firmly. When next you see things working contrary to the truth of God, believe God, and believe nothing else. Let God be true and every man a liar. Though men and devils should give God the lie, hold you on to what God has spoken; for heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of his word shall fall to the ground."

3. The fact that Jesus' bones were not broken also points to him as *the Passover Lamb* slain for the sins of his people. A moment ago we quoted Psalm 34:20, which tells us, "He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken." This is the verse John refers to; there is no other quite like it in the entire Old Testament. But if we are candid, we must admit that a careful reading of this psalm does not at once suggest that this verse should be applied to the Messiah. It refers rather to the righteous man about whom David is writing. What is wrong then? Is this a case of invention on John's part? Not at all. It is true that he is referring to this psalm, but he is thinking of something greater. He is remembering that in the institution of the Passover it was explicitly indicated that not a bone of the Passover lamb should be broken. Exodus 12:46 declares, "It must be eaten inside one house; take none of the meat outside the house.

Do not break any of the bones." Again, Numbers 9:12 says, "They must not leave any of it till morning or break any of its bones." This seemingly pointless detail in the Passover ritual and this seemingly pointless detail in the death of Jesus combine in God's providence to identify Jesus as the Passover Lamb through whom we have a spiritual deliverance.

John has seen this all along, of course, and he has described the events of the crucifixion in such a way that the timing of Christ's death at the very time the Passover lambs were being killed is kept in view. In fact, at the very beginning of this section John indicates that these things were done because it was "the day of preparation" of the Passover.

Every Jew knew the significance of the Passover. This was the event in which God delivered the people from their slavery in Egypt. God had said that on this night he would bring the last of his ten great judgments upon Egypt, a judgment in which the firstborn of every household would be killed. God would send his angel to slay the firstborn throughout the whole land. The Jewish homes would be spared only if they followed these instructions. They were to take a lamb, which was to have been kept in the home for three days and was to be without blemish or spot, and were to kill it. Then they were to take the blood of the lamb and spread it upon the doorposts and lintel of the house. The angel of death would come, but wherever he would see the blood he would "pass over," and the inhabitants of that house would be spared. This was the great national event and festival that the Jews were beginning to remember the day that Jesus of Nazareth was killed. What John is indicating (and God who speaks through him) is that Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of that important Old Testament figure. We are sinners. We deserve to die. The angel of God's judgment is coming. But Jesus has died in our place. His blood has purged our sin; now, because of his death, the angel of judgment will pass by all who trust in him.

4. This leads to the fourth reason John wrote these verses, particularly the verses that mention the water and blood. John calls attention to this incident as fulfilling the prophecy in Zechariah 12:10. Many students have stopped with that verse. But the

meaning of what John is saying is to be found just five verses farther in the passage, namely Zechariah 13:1, which really belongs with the preceding section. That verse speaks of a day when "a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity." Certainly John knew this verse. Moreover, he knew from the Old Testament how important "blood" was for cleansing from sin (e.g., Lev. 17:11) and how important "water" was for purification from uncleanness. Therefore, when he saw these two elements issue from the pierced side of Christ and recalled this prophecy, he recognized it as teaching that all *deliverance and cleansing from sin and its defilement* are to be found in Jesus' death.

Someone else recognized it. William Cowper, the English poet, wrote the great hymn "There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood" in commemoration of this incident.

There is a fountain filled
with blood Drawn from
Immanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged
beneath that flood Lose all
their guilty stains.
The dying thief
rejoiced to see That
fountain in his day,
And there may I, as
vile as he, Wash all
my sins away.
E'er since by faith I saw
the stream Thy
flowing wounds
supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme
And shall be till I die.

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed church of God Be saved to sin no more.

John the apostle, William Cowper, and countless others have seen these truths and have rejoiced in Christ's death as that through which we have salvation. In one sense, every believer has rejoiced in these truths, even though he or she may not have understood these particular verses as I have interpreted them. Are you one of that number? Are you one who by faith has spread the blood of the perfect Passover upon your doorpost? Have you believed in Jesus? If not, may the spear that pierced Christ's side prick your heart also. May *your* heart be broken as you look at him. This was John's purpose in recording these verses: that you might look to Jesus and trust him. There is salvation in such a believing look. Look to Jesus. There is life in this moment for all who believe on him.

Chapter 253.
With the Rich in His Death

John 19:38-42

The verses that conclude the nineteenth chapter of John are not the first in which we meet with secret discipleship, but they give the saddest and most striking example of that condition. Secret discipleship is discussed first in John 12, where the author, after having summarized the rejection of Jesus by his own people in accordance with Isaiah's prophecy, adds, "Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God" (vv. 42-43). The verses in John 12 do not name these secret believers—they were *secret* believers, after all. But

we find two examples in John 19:38-42— Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus.

We do not know a great deal about either of these men, but what we do know is significant. We know that they were each rich and prominent. Both were members of the Sanhedrin. They believed in Jesus, at least to some degree, though whether or not they were born again we cannot tell. Nicodemus had confessed at the beginning of Jesus' ministry that he was at least "a teacher from God" (John 3:2). But the fear which had kept him from coming to Jesus openly on that occasion—he came by night, a fact that John reiterates each time he mentions him—also kept him from Jesus during his earthly ministry and kept him silent while Jesus was being condemned and crucified. Joseph of Arimathaea is described as "a disciple" (John 19:38; cf. Matt. 27:57), "a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God" (Mark 15:43), "a good and upright man" (Luke 23:50). We are told that he "had not consented" to the decision of those who had condemned Jesus (Luke 23:51). Yet Joseph's protests were apparently silent ones, and we cannot really say that he was converted either. He may have been; the description is a bit more hopeful in his case than in that of Nicodemus. But we cannot be sure. Neither is mentioned again in the New Testament or in other early Christian documents.

Do you say, "But these were at least in Jerusalem caring for the body of the Lord when his more open, vocal disciples had fled"? That is true, but it says more about the failure of the Twelve than it does about the discipleship of Joseph and Nicodemus. Many memorials have been built, many stained-glass windows installed, many chairs of theology endowed by those who have come no closer to the possession of eternal life than to have a guilty conscience. Are you one who is like Nicodemus or this counselor from Arimathaea? If so, I hope to disturb you by showing how close you are to those millions who adhere to Christianity but have no saving faith at all. I hope to move you to become something more in Christ's church than a funeral director. I should like you to become a witness to the living God.

How will I do this? In two ways. I want to show first the cause of secret discipleship, and also how unnecessary and dangerous this is. Then I want to show the sad results of a failure to confess Christ openly.

Fear of the Jews

There is no mystery as to what kept Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus from confessing Jesus. It was fear, "fear of the Jews," as John tells us. When I read this explanation in John 19, I cannot help contrasting it with the slightly different explanation John 12 gives of the same failure to confess Jesus openly. There it was said that many did not confess him because "they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (v. 43). That leads me to think that fear of ridicule lives on as a deterrent even after the vanity of seeking praise from others is gone.

We may suppose that in their early days Joseph and Nicodemus may have pursued the kind of life they did in order to be well thought of. Certainly many do it today. Some seek it through wealth, because the rich are generally courted by the less fortunate. Some seek it through prestigious titles and positions—by being a member of the Sanhedrin or city council or bar or civic organization. But these things fade in time, and perceptive people are eventually disillusioned by the emptiness of human honors. What then? Do they come to their senses and abandon vanity for things that are worthwhile? Sometimes, but not always or even usually. The reason most do not is that fear of what others may think or do deters them. Many who would not fail to confess Christ because of their desire for praise, nevertheless fail to confess him because they think that someone might despise them or laugh them to scorn.

Alexander Maclaren has excellent thoughts on this subject. 'There is nothing in the organization of society at this day to make any man afraid of avowing the ordinary kind of Christianity which satisfies the most of us; rather it is the proper thing with the bulk of us middleclass people, to say that in some sense or other we are Christians. But when it comes to a real avowal, a real carrying out of a true discipleship, there

are as many and as formidable, though very different, impediments in the way today, from those which blocked the path of these two cowards in our text. In all regions of life it is hard to work out into practice any moral conviction whatever. How many of us are there who have beliefs about social and moral questions which we are ashamed to avow in certain companies for fear of the finger of ridicule being pointed at us?... The political, social, and moral conflicts of this day have their 'secret disciples,' who will only come out of their holes when the battle is over, and will then shout with the loudest."

Why is it that in a day when every vice of humanity is coming "out of the closet" and clamoring for recognition as a pure and natural expression of the essentially "good" human spirit, many believers (or alleged believers) fail to come out for Christ? It is fear, fear of what someone may say.

How unnecessary and dangerous this is! It is unnecessary because there is no danger in ridicule. It may be unpleasant, distasteful. We may naturally prefer a different treatment from our contemporaries and peers. But there is no danger in it. In fact, the opposite is true. When we take a stand for righteousness, we are most secure. It is when we are silent that we are most in danger, not only in this life but in regard to the life that is to come.

If you are holding back from an outright confession of Christ and a determination to stand with him whatever may come, you are probably rationalizing your failure in this fashion. You are saying, "My testimony will not do any good. What matters is that I am God's child, and I can be that in silence." Can you? Can you have confidence that you are really born again if you will not confess Christ openly? You know the Scriptures: "If anyone comes after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23); "Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27); "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Rom. 10:9-10); "Whoever acknowledges

me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will also disown him before my Father in heaven" (Matt. 10:32-33).

If you do not confess Christ openly and stand with him even in the face of ridicule, I do not see what right you have to consider yourself any different from Pontius Pilate, for it was fear that kept him back from righteousness. Do you respect Christ? So did Pilate. Do you honestly want to do the right thing? So did he. Do you say, "I find no fault in Jesus"? This was Pilate's testimony. But his fear of Caesar triumphed over his more noble instincts. Be careful that you are not following in his train.

Loss of Communion

It may be the case that you really are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, though for the most part secretly. If so, I want to encourage you to an early boldness by showing the sad results of failing to proclaim Christ openly.

The first result is a loss of fellowship with Christ. I think it is this that comes through most clearly in the case of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea. We do not know when Joseph first heard of Jesus and believed on him, but it was probably early. Nicodemus knew of Jesus from the beginning, for he had come to him when his teachings and miracles had first became known. These men might have profited from two, perhaps three years of the most intense communion and fellowship with Jesus. They could have learned from his teaching, benefited from his example, received instruction from him directly as to how the advance of the kingdom of God in the world was to be carried out. We are told of Joseph that he was actually "waiting for the kingdom of God." Yet he missed it—because he would not confess Christ openly.

Again I quote Maclaren. "Any neglected duty puts a film between a man and his Savior; any conscious neglect of duty piles up a wall between you and Christ. Be sure of this, that if from cowardly or from selfish regard to position and advantages, or any other motive, we stand

apart from him, and have our lips locked when we ought to speak, there will steal over our hearts a coldness, his face will be averted from us, and our eyes will not dare to seek, with the same confidence and joy, the light of his countenance. What you lose by unfaithful wrapping of your convictions in a napkin and burying them in the ground is the joyful use of the convictions, the deeper hold of the truth by which you live, and before which you bow, and the true fellowship with the Master whom you acknowledge and confess."

Besides, it is not only communion with Christ that you lose. You also lose that blessed and valuable communion that you should and must have with other Christians. They are with Christ; if you are not with him, you are not with them either and you will suffer for it. An ember isolated from other embers soon burns out and is nothing but dead ashes. Place it near others and the flame soon grows and sets other wood burning. If you have never learned this before, put it down as a great and unalterable principle: *Christians need other Christians.* You need them. If you think you do not, you are either a fool or hopelessly proud or arrogant.

I think I can hear some objections. The first is that Christians are often a very sorry bunch. True, but is that not also the case with you, particularly if you are a secret believer? I will tell you one thing: If you refuse to identify with other believers because you think they are sorry specimens of discipleship, you are actually considering yourself superior and that is a very questionable stance for one who is supposed to have confessed his sin and turned from all self-righteousness to faith in Jesus Christ. If you really are a sinner, then you belong with those sinners for whom Christ died. If you consider yourself better than they are, what makes you think that you have actually been born into God's family?

Again, what company have you found that is superior? That of unbelievers? The world? If you are thinking along those lines, you are a great fool, for it is the world that, for all its supposed glamour and

sophistication, crucified your Master. What makes you think it will treat you more kindly when once it finds that you belong to him?

I hear another objection. You say that you would like to come out for Christ but that others whom you love and respect—perhaps a husband or wife, children or parents—are holding you back. Held back by those you love? I do not see how you can say that you love them if you are unwilling to take that one stand which by the grace of God is most likely to be used by him in their conversions. More than in any other way God's grace spreads through families. If you love them, you will come out for Christ and then look to him for help in bringing them to that same belief and profession.

There are those who have done it. I think of one girl who became a Christian in Philadelphia and then went home at considerable personal loss to reach her parents for Christ. They are now believers and leaders in the Christian community in which they live. I think of another girl, a Filipino, who returned to an island village in which there was not even one single Christian. But she identified with Christ, and many have now come to know him.

Drawn by Love

I know that it is not arguments of this kind that will ultimately reach you. It is only love for Christ himself, love that will be generated at Christ's cross.

Here I may be encouraging, for it was obviously the death of Christ that brought cowardly Joseph and weak Nicodemus from their places of hiding. It is true, much to their shame, that during the days of his ministry they had failed to profess Christ openly. But in his death—at the precise moment when even the other, bolder disciples had fled—these came forward, touched by that loving sacrifice which Jesus made for our salvation. They awoke to their cowardice—and to God's love. Again, I do not say that they were necessarily believers. Guilty consciences have done as much on many similar occasions. But the

death of Christ obviously awakened something within them, and they seemed willing at last to identify themselves as his followers.

God can do that with you, if you will but look on Christ's passion. The Bible says, "God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). It is in Christ's death that we see God's love. Does that not move you? True, you may have held back before, hardly knowing whether you were a true believer or not. But you *can* come forward. He died for you. He paid the price for your sin. He bore the anguish of the cross for your salvation. How can you fail to love him? If you love him, how can you fail to confess that to everyone?

I will give you one more incentive. Notice that in his burial Jesus is already taking the first step toward that exaltation at God's hand that is now his, from which he shall come forth in power at the end of the age. There was a true day of the jackal when men cursed and laughed and hated and spit upon him. There was a day of humiliation, but that day is now past. It ended with his death. Now even in his burial he is attended with love as those who have the means to care for his body and bury him honorably wait upon him. It was prophesied. Isaiah tells us that although he was to die in the company of the wicked he was to be attended by the rich in his death (Isa. 53:9). Besides, this is now followed by resurrection victory and the ascent to heaven.

The Christ you are asked to follow is not a humiliated Jewish preacher but the Lord of glory. Indeed, he does not merely ask you to come to him; he commands it. He tells you to turn from your sin and come to him openly for salvation. Will you do that? Will you come? "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Rev. 22:17).

Chapter 254.

The Not-Quite-Empty Tomb

John 20:1-10

One of the great historical evidences of Jesus' resurrection is the empty tomb. But the remarkable and startling fact is that when Peter and John arrived at the tomb on the first Easter morning, it was not quite empty. The body of Jesus was gone, but something was still there: the graveclothes. Something about them so struck John, at least, that he believed in the resurrection.

Significantly, this is the first time a disciple indicated belief in the resurrection. During the last century a well-known French critic of the Gospels, Ernest Renan, argued that Christian faith in the resurrection was the result of the rumors spread by Mary Magdalene, who had suffered a hallucination, thinking she had seen Jesus. But Mary could not have suffered a hallucination. The last thing in the world she ever expected was her Lord's resurrection. And John testifies that he believed some time before Mary returned to the tomb and met Jesus.

Events of Easter Morning

Jesus had been crucified either on Friday (as the church has generally believed) or else on Thursday (which is less widely held but which seems to fit the evidence better). He lay in the tomb until the resurrection, which certainly took place before dawn on Sunday morning. At this point the women came to the tomb from Jerusalem bearing spices to anoint his body. There were at least four women and probably more. Matthew says that the group included Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, that is, Mary the mother of James. Mark adds that Salome was present. Luke says that Joanna was also along and others. These women started out while it was yet dark and arrived at the tomb in the early dawn when it was difficult to distinguish objects.

On reaching the tomb the women were astonished to find the stone removed from the entrance.

We must imagine them standing about, afraid to go too close and wondering what had happened. Who moved the stone? Had the body of Jesus been stolen? Had Joseph of Arimathaea removed it to another place? What were they to do? At last they decided that the disciples must be told, and Mary Magdalene was dispatched to find them. Not one of them imagined that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

After awhile it began to grow lighter and the women grew bolder. They decided to look into the tomb. There they saw the angels. The women were afraid. But an angel said, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples" (Matt. 28:5-7).

Mary meanwhile found the two chief disciples, Peter and John, presumably in John's house where the beloved disciple had taken Jesus' mother on the day of the crucifixion (John 19:27).

The two disciples started for the tomb, running and leaving Mary far behind. Outrunning Peter, John arrived at the tomb first, stooped to look through the narrow opening, and saw the graveclothes. Then Peter arrived, out of breath and in a hurry; he brushed John aside and plunged into the tomb. When John saw the graveclothes, he saw them only in a cursory manner and from outside the tomb. The Greek uses the most common word for seeing (*blepō*); it suggests nothing more than sight. But when Peter arrived he scrutinized the graveclothes carefully. The Scripture uses a special word (*theoreō*) for what Peter did (from it we get our words "theory" and "theorize"). Moreover, it tells what Peter saw. The Bible says that Peter "went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen" (John 20:6-7). At this point John entered, saw what Peter had seen (this time the word is *oraō*, meaning "to see with understanding"), and believed in Jesus' resurrection (v. 8).

After this the appearances of the Lord began. Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene who arrived back at the tomb after John and Peter

had returned to the city. Next he appeared to the women, then to Peter alone, then to the Emmaus disciples, finally, later that night, to all the disciples as they were gathered together in the upper room. All the disciples who saw the risen Lord believed. But John believed first, and he did so before he actually saw Jesus. What made him believe? What did he see that convinced him of Jesus' resurrection?

Jewish Burial

It is helpful at this point to know something about the modes of Jewish burial. Every society has its distinct modes of burial. In Egypt, bodies were embalmed. In Rome and Greece they were often cremated. In Palestine they were neither embalmed nor cremated. They were wrapped in linen bands that enclosed dry spices and placed face up without a coffin in tombs, generally cut from the rock in the Judean and Galilean hills. Many of these tombs exist today and can be seen by any visitor to Palestine.

Another factor of Jewish burial in ancient times is also of special interest for understanding John's account of Jesus' resurrection. In *The Risen Master,* published in 1901, Henry Latham calls attention to a unique feature of Eastern burials that he noticed when in Constantinople during the last century. He says that funerals he witnessed often varied in many respects, depending upon whether the funeral was for a person who had been poor or for one who had been rich. But in one respect all the arrangements were identical. Latham noticed that the bodies were wrapped in linen cloths in such a manner as to leave the face, neck, and upper part of the shoulders bare. The upper part of the head was covered by a cloth that had been twirled about it like a turban. Latham concluded that since burial styles change slowly, particularly in the East, this mode of burial may well have been practiced in Jesus' time. He argued that this is all the more probable since the practice in 1900 meshes nicely with what is told of the graveclothes in John's Gospel.

There is additional evidence for this thesis. Luke tells us that when Jesus was approaching the village of Nain earlier in his ministry, he met

a funeral procession leaving the city. The only son of a widow had died. Luke says that when Jesus raised him from death two things happened. First, the young man sat up; that is, he was lying upon his back on the bier without a coffin. Second, he began to speak. Hence, the graveclothes did not cover his face. Separate coverings for the head and body were also used in the burial of Lazarus (John 11:44).

We have every reason to believe that Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus buried Jesus Christ in a similar manner. The body of Jesus was removed from the cross before the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, washed and wrapped in linen bands. Seventy-five pounds of spices were carefully inserted into the folds of the linen. Aloe was a powdered wood like fine sawdust with an aromatic fragrance; myrrh was a fragrant gum that would be carefully mixed with the powder. Jesus' body was encased in these. His head, neck, and upper shoulders were left bare and a linen cloth was wrapped about the upper part of his head like a turban. The body of Jesus was then lovingly placed within the sepulcher where it lay until sometime on Saturday night or early Sunday morning.

The Resurrection

What would we have seen had we been there at the moment at which Jesus was raised from the dead? Would we have seen Jesus stir, open his eyes, sit up, and begin to struggle out of the bandages? That would have been a resuscitation, not a resurrection. It would have been as if he had recovered from a swoon or had merely been raised from death as he had raized Lazarus. He would have been raised in a natural body rather than a spiritual body; that was not the case at all.

If we had been present in the tomb at the moment of the resurrection, we would have noticed either that the body of Jesus would have seemed to have disappeared or else that it was changed into a resurrection body and passed through the graveclothes and out of the sealed tomb just as it was later to pass through closed doors. John Stott says that the body was "vaporized, being transmuted into something new and different and wonderful." Latham says that the body would have been "exhaled,"

passing "into a phase of being like that of Moses and Elias on the Mount."

What would have happened then? The linen cloths would have subsided once the body was removed because of the weight of the spices that were in them, and they would have been lying undisturbed where the body of Jesus had been. The cloth which surrounded the head, without the weight of spices, might well have retained its concave shape and have lain by itself separated from the body cloths by the space where the Lord's neck and shoulders had been.

This is exactly what John says he and Peter saw when they entered the sepulcher. John was first at the tomb, and as he reached the open sepulcher in the murky light of early dawn he saw the graveclothes lying. There was something about them that attracted John's attention. First, it was significant that they were there at all. John stresses the point, using the word for "lying" at an emphatic position in the sentence. We might translate, "He saw, lying there, the graveclothes" (v. 5). Furthermore, the clothes were undisturbed. The word that John uses (*keimena*) occurs in the Greek papyrii of things that have been carefully placed in order. One document speaks of legal documents, saying, "I have not yet obtained the documents, but they are lying collated." Another speaks of clothes that are "lying (in order) until you send me word." Certainly John noticed that there had been no disturbance at the tomb.

At this point Peter arrived and went into the sepulcher. Peter saw what John had seen, but in addition he was struck by something else. The cloth that had been around the head was not with the other clothes. It was lying in a place by itself (v. 7). What was even more striking, it had retained a circular shape. John says that it was "wrapped together." We might say that it was "twirled about itself." There was a space between it and the cloths that had enveloped the body. When John saw this he believed.

What did John believe? I imagine that he might have explained it to Peter like this. "Don't you see, Peter, that no one has moved the body or

disturbed the graveclothes? They are lying exactly as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea left them on the eve of the Sabbath. Yet the body is gone. It has not been stolen. It has not been moved. Clearly it must have passed through the cloths, leaving them as we see them now. Jesus must be risen." Stott says, "A glance at these grave clothes proved the reality, and indicated the nature, of the resurrection."

How foolish in the light of such evidence are non-Christian explanations of the events of Easter morning. Some have taught that the body of Jesus was stolen, but in that case the presence of the graveclothes is inexplicable. They would have been removed along with the body. Others have taught that Jesus revived in the tomb and escaped after having unwound the linen bands. In that case the linen would have been displaced. Even if we can imagine that Jesus replaced the clothes where they had been and somehow moved the stone, there is still a problem with the spices, for these would have been scattered about the tomb. Of this there is not the slightest suggestion in the Gospel. None of these explanations will do. The disciples saw everything in order, but the body was gone. Jesus had indeed been raised, and in a resurrection body.

What John Believed

There are a few lessons that arise out of this narrative. The first is that God has provided perfectly adequate evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The evidence consists of the claims of those who saw Jesus between the day of his resurrection and the day of his ascension into heaven, the empty tomb, the changed character of the disciples, the authenticity of the records, and the evidence of the undisturbed burial garments. The evidence is there, and the evidence of the graveclothes alone was sufficient to quicken faith in John. We conclude that if men fail to believe, it is because they will not believe, not because the evidence is lacking.

Second, the experiences of Peter and John at the tomb indicate that the body of the Lord was glorified. It was sown a natural body and was raised a spiritual body. In this body Jesus lives, seated at the right hand

of God where he intercedes for his own until the moment when he will return again in judgment. Today we need not think of Jesus as the vulnerable Jesus of history. Jesus died, but he died once for all. He was buffeted and spat upon and cursed, but that will not be repeated. We pray today to a powerful Lord, to an exalted Lord. This Lord will return one day to take his own to be with him in glory.

Finally, the transformation of the body of Jesus Christ points to a new mode of life for all believers. He is the first fruit. We, the harvest, shall be like him in our bodies as well as in his traits of character. Our resurrection bodies will be better than our old physical bodies. They will not be our physical bodies resuscitated. Our bodies hamper us. They tie us to earth, to habits, even to traits of character that we have inherited from our parents through their genes. They slow our thought processes. When we are sufficiently tired they carry us away in sleep. Eventually they die. But we are to gain by death. The resurrection body will not hamper us. The body of the risen Christ is the forerunner of our bodies, and it was and is wholly subservient to his wishes. It did not hamper him. It freed him. In that body he knew no pain, no suffering, no want. For us there will also be freedom. There will be no want. There will be unlimited awakefulness and unlimited opportunities for service.

In one of his great sermons on the resurrection D. L. Moody tells the story of a bright young girl about fifteen years of age who was suddenly cast upon a bed of suffering, completely paralyzed on one side and nearly blind. She could hardly see, but she could hear. As she lay in bed one day she heard the family doctor say to her parents as they stood by the bedside, "She has seen her best days, poor child." Fortunately the girl was a believer, and she quickly replied, "No, doctor, my best days are yet to come, when I shall see the King in his beauty." Her hope, like ours, lay in the resurrection.

Chapter 255.

The Day Faith Died

John 20:11-16

If there is any story in all literature more poignant than the story of Mary Magdalene's meeting with Jesus in the garden on the first Lord's day, I do not know what it is. But to understand it we have to put ourselves in the frame of mind of the disciples between the afternoon of Jesus' crucifixion and the morning of his resurrection, and that is not easy to do. Our experience of Easter is one of faith and joy. But in the days that elapsed between Christ's death and resurrection, those who were closest to him were filled with the deepest disillusionment and gloom. They had been told of Christ's resurrection, but they had not understood it. Therefore, when Jesus died, there is a sense in which they died also.

For three years this mixed body of men and women had followed Jesus in his itinerant preaching ministry. They did not understand much of what he said. But they tried to, and what they did understand they believed. When Jesus died, their faith died, and they began to demonstrate the death of faith by scattering back to where they had been before Jesus had called them to discipleship. The women went home. Cleopas and Mary returned to their village. The others would have returned to Galilee eventually, for they did this anyway even after they had been convinced of Christ's resurrection. In earlier days they had given good testimonies—"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16), "We believe and are sure that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:69)—but in the period between the crucifixion and the resurrection this had become past tense. They had believed once, but it was over.

I Will Not Believe

No one better illustrates the death of faith than Thomas. We are not told much about him, only that he was inclined to a very sober estimate of things. We call him "doubting Thomas," but to speak accurately, he was no doubter at this point. He was an outright unbeliever. Alexander

Maclaren has written, "Flat, frank, dogged disbelief, and not hesitation or doubt, was his attitude. The very form in which he puts his requirement shows how he was hugging his unbelief, and how he had no idea that what he asked would ever be granted. 'Unless I have so-and-so I will not,' indicates an altogether [different] spiritual attitude from what 'If I have so-and-so, I will,' would have indicated. The one is the language of willingness to be persuaded, the other is a token of a determination to be obstinate."

It was not a very commendable attitude, but thus it was. And thus it was with all the disciples— before the resurrection.

We Had Hoped

Moreover, it was not only faith that had died in these disciples; hope had died also. They had possessed such great hopes. Yet all these had been dashed into pieces by Christ's crucifixion.

The great example of the death of hope is the statement of the Emmaus disciples recorded in Luke 24:21, though it was, of course, true of them all. Like the others, these two disciples had looked for the dawning of Messiah's reign upon earth. They thought that Jesus was that Messiah; so they had followed him, looking for a place in his kingdom. But now the inconceivable had happened. Jesus had died, and their hopes had died with him. So clouded were their minds by this disappointment that they did not even recognize the Lord when he drew near them on the Emmaus way. He asked what they had been talking about and why they were sad. They answered, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?"

They answered, "About Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had *hoped* that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:17-21). Isn't it interesting that they used the word "redeem," because, of course, that is precisely what the Lord was doing

—redeeming Israel, and all who should thereafter believe on him as Savior from sin. But that is not what they were thinking. They were thinking of the national, temporal, messianic redemption upon which their hopes had been set throughout the three years of his ministry. They had hoped for that, but when Jesus died they knew at last that it was not coming.

Love Lives

Faith had died and hope had died. But there was one thing that had not died—love. For in spite of their cruel disillusionment and virtual despair, the disciples all still loved their Master and could not cease thinking of him and grieving over him. The great example is Mary.

We do not know a great deal about Mary of Magdalene. But we must be careful to distinguish what we do know from those spurious details that have been added to the account by years of tradition. The Bible tells us that Mary had been the object of Christ's special grace, and that he had sent seven demons out of her (Luke 8:2). For no sound reason at all, church tradition identified her with the unnamed sinner of Luke 7, who anointed the feet of Jesus in the house of a wealthy Pharisee—probably because Mary of Bethany later did the same thing in the house of Lazarus, and there was a confusion of these two accounts and the two Marys. After this she was assumed to have been a prostitute before Christ saved her, and by the seventeenth century "Magdalene" was being used as a word to describe a reformed prostitute. We do not know whether this was her case or not. But Christ had saved her from something terrible, and she had learned to love him. Jesus said that the one who has been forgiven much, loves much (Luke 7:47). This was true of Mary. Thus, earlier in Jesus' ministry we learn that she ministered to him out of her substance (Luke 8:3), and we find that at the end she is still trying to do this by anointing his body.

We will never understand the account of Christ's appearance to Mary at the tomb unless we recognize that it was love, and only love, that brought her here. She had possessed faith once, as had the others. She had hoped. But now faith and hope were gone. Only love caused her to seek the body and held her close to the tomb.

Mary was one of the group of women who had been in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion and who had therefore witnessed the Lord's agonies. We read on three separate occasions that she was among those women who saw the crucifixion (Matt. 27:55-56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25). No doubt she witnessed the other events as well—the roar of the crowd as, goaded by the priests, they shouted, "Take him away! Crucify him! Crucify him!"; the judgment of Pilate; the procession to Calvary,

during which time Christ fell under the weight of the cross and had to be relieved of it by Simon of Cyrene in order that the death march might proceed; the driving of the nails; the terrible cries ("I thirst"; "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"); the darkness; the earthquake; at last death. Mary witnessed all this. It would have been a severe strain on even the strongest of men. Who could stomach such things? Yet, through it all, there is Mary. What keeps her there? Not curiosity, certainly. Not faith. Not hope in a miracle. Mary is there only because she loves Jesus and consequently will not leave until the end.

And even then her love lived on, for though Jesus was gone, Mary still wished to do something for him. She determined to buy spices, and the others agreed. They did this just before the shops closed for the Passover Sabbath. The Sabbaths went by, first the Passover Sabbath (which, in that year, probably fell on a Friday) and then the regular Saturday Sabbath. Thus, it was on the following Sunday morning that Mary and the other women made their way to the tomb to perform their last services. They knew that the stone had been placed over the entrance to the burial cave, for they were asking, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?" If we ask, "But then how did they expect to anoint the body?" the answer is that they did not know. They hoped that someone might be there to move the stone, but they were not really thinking clearly at that point.

Upon reaching the graveyard they noticed that the stone had been moved. It suited their purpose, but it was not what they had been expecting. So they stopped and asked themselves what they should do. At last they decided that the disciples, Peter and John, should be told. So Mary was either dispatched or else volunteered to tell them. While she was gone (and, therefore, unknown to her), the remaining women went forward, saw and heard the angels, and then rushed off in amazement to convey the angels' message: "He is not here. He is risen, just as he said" (Matt. 28:6). Shortly after they had gone, Peter and John arrived, having received Mary's message and then raced to the tomb.

Where was Mary? She had been left behind by Peter and John, gentlemen that they were! But that did not disturb her, for her mind was

on Jesus. Quite naturally she set out for the tomb once more.

I wonder if you can identify with the strain this woman was under. She had seen the person she loved most in all the world taken from her and brutally executed. She had planned to perform some last rites on the body, but this had been frustrated, at least temporarily. She had been going back and forth from the city to the tomb in the dark or semidark for what must have seemed hours. Now she arrives back at the tomb to find Peter and John and the other women gone. She is alone, totally deserted, and it is beyond her emotional capacity. She bursts out weeping. Undoubtedly she had wept before, at the crucifixion. The days of the Sabbaths had been filled with weeping. How she could find more tears is almost beyond understanding. But there were some. It is therefore with tear-filled eyes that she looks into the sepulcher and sees the angels.

"Woman, why are you crying?" they ask her.

She answers, "They have taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have put him." Mary is not startled by the angels, as the women who preceded her were. Perhaps she did not even recognize that they were angels. We read, therefore, that "at this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there" (John 20:14).

Rabboni

Mary did not recognize Jesus, even after he had spoken to her. It is foolish to ask why she didn't recognize him. Later when he presented himself to the Emmaus disciples, they did not recognize him either; so perhaps his appearance was changed. Besides, Mary was not seeing clearly, and she certainly did not expect the resurrection. "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" It was the voice of Jesus, but Mary did not recognize it. She imagined that the One speaking to her was the gardener.

Mary answered in what is surely one of the most touching sentences in all human literature. "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where

you have put him, and I will get him."

Barnhouse writes of this poignant offer, "She was still thinking in terms of a dead body. She had been weeping for three days and three nights and her heart was empty even though she still had a few tears left. She had passed through unutterable anguish and had been for many hours without sleep. She had been three times out to the tomb and twice back to the town. [Now] she offered to carry away the full weight of the body of a man, plus the hundred pound weight of myrrh and aloes. The Bible tells us that the body had been anointed with one hundred pounds of spices which Nicodemus had wrapped in the linen which enshrouded the body (John 19:39). Even if Jesus were slight of weight, Mary was offering, without thinking, to carry away a weight of body and linen cloth and ointments which would go beyond the strength of many a strong man. But she did not think of this for she loved the Lord Jesus Christ, and though her faith and hope were dead, her love was strong. Here is one of the greatest character portrayals in all of literature, human or divine. Here is the heart of a good woman. Here is love, offering to do the impossible as love always does."

At this point Mary must have turned her back on Christ once again; for later, after he had called her name, we read that she turned back to him. She was not interested in the gardener. She had made her request of him in her grief and confusion. But her heart was still true to the Lord, and she turned back to the tomb where she had seen his body last.

"Mary!"

"Rabboni (Master)!"

As Mary responded to his pronunciation of her name, she turned back to Christ again. When she had supposed him to be only the gardener, she had no interest in him or anything he might say. But now she had heard her name from Jesus' lips; and as sheep know the voice of their shepherd when he calls them by name, so she recognized him and responded joyfully, "Master!" In that moment Mary experienced her own resurrection, for she was reborn. Faith had died, but now it came

leaping from its tomb. Hope had evaporated, but now it gathered again around the person of the Lord.

The Greatest of These

You may be one who has never known any of these three responses to Jesus Christ—neither faith nor hope nor love. You say that you cannot believe, that you have no grounds for hope, that you do not see how you can love him. If this is your case, may I suggest that you begin with love. Begin with the knowledge that he loves you. That love is shown by his death for you. He commends his love to you by this fact. The Book of Romans says, "But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Can you not focus on his death on your behalf and love him for that? I am convinced that if you do focus on his death, you will hear him call your name and, when he does, you will recognize him and respond gladly.

'John! Mary! Peter! Alice! James! (Whatever your name is!)"

"Master!" In that moment faith will be born in you and hope will triumph. You will be his forever.

Faith, hope, and love! Three great virtues! "But the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13).

Chapter 256.
New Relationships for a New Age

John 20:17

In the last century the well-known German historian Adolf Harnack made popular a phrase that in his judgment summed up the whole of Christianity: "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man." This, said Harnack, is the teaching of the Scriptures. We all have one father, and we are all brothers and sisters in the one family of God, which is the human race.

Harnack should have known better than that, for in defining the message of the Bible in this way he made two fundamental errors. First, the use of the word "Father" for God and the words "brother" and "sister" for men and women occurs only in reference to believers. God is not said to be the Father of all men, nor are all men and women said to be brothers and sisters. In fact, as in the case of Christ's conversation with the rulers of his day (found in John 8), some persons are said to be children of their "father the devil" (John 8:44). We are all God's offspring, as Paul indicated in speaking to the Athenians (Acts 17:28). We are his creatures. But only those who believe on Christ are said to be *children* of their heavenly Father.

Second, Harnack erred in failing to see that the relationships of which the Bible speaks are not things intrinsic to humanity but rather something new that has been established by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This latter truth is particularly evident in the verses to which we come now, because in these verses, for the first time and therefore significantly following his death and resurrection, Jesus begins to introduce these themes into his teaching. He had spoken of God as Father before, but not in this way. Before this he had not referred to the disciples as brothers at all. Now because of the new age of the church that he had ushered in, he also ushers in a new set of relationships.

It is interesting to contrast what Jesus did as he entered into his kingdom with what another king, mentioned in literature, did as he entered into his. The king is Henry V, whose character is carefully analyzed by Shakespeare in the three plays *Henry IV, Part 1*, *Henry TV, Part 2,* and *Henry V.* In his youth the young prince Hal had friends who were not a credit to him. They were low types, the kind who spent their time drinking, gambling, and running around with loose women. The best known of these lowly companions was John Falstaff about whom other plays were written. In these days Henry did not live like a king. But the time came when he ascended the throne and, although his friends thought that now they would be ushered into the palace and be able to carry on their dissolute life under the king's protection, the new

king turned his back on them and began to conduct himself as worthy of his new position.

In a similar way our Lord had what we might call "low" companions during the days of his earthly ministry, though of course he did not defile himself through his association with them. But by contrast, when he entered into glory through his death, resurrection, and ascension, he did not turn his back on his companions but rather ushered them into relationships that before this were uniquely his own. Now God becomes their Father as well as his, and they are given family privileges.

A Problem Text

There are three new relationships in this verse: a new relationship to Christ, a new relationship to the Father, and a new relationship to one another. But this is a problem verse, and it is only when we understand the importance of the first of these new relationships, the new relationship to Christ, that we can begin to sort out the difficulties.

The main difficulty is that the Lord tells Mary Magdalene, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father." Yet we know from a parallel incident in Matthew that he apparently allowed the other women who had been to the tomb to touch him just a few minutes later on the same day (Matt. 28:9). Again, we might ask, "Why shouldn't Mary touch him?" This would have been the most natural thing in the world, and it seems harsh to our way of thinking to have Jesus rebuke her or stop her obvious act of love and adoration in midcourse.

We must acknowledge that there is no general agreement by commentators on how to interpret this verse. Nor can we even say that there is a conservative view versus a liberal one. Students of the Gospel are simply undecided. The three general categories of interpretation are, however, well suggested by the footnote at the bottom of page 1156 in the New Scofield edition of the Bible. It suggests, "(1) That Jesus spoke to Mary, acting, as it were, as the High Priest fulfilling the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). Having accomplished the sacrifice, He was on His way to present the sacred blood in heaven; and, between the

meeting with Mary in the garden and the meeting of Mt. 28:9, He had so ascended and returned—a view in harmony with types. (2) That Mary was gently rebuked by Christ in the command, 'Touch me not' (lit., 'Stop clinging to me').
The Lord taught Mary that now she must not seek to hold Him to the earth but, rather, become His messenger of new joy. And (3) that He merely meant: 'Do not detain me now; I am not yet ascended; you will see me again; run rather to my brethren,' etc."

One thing we can say of this difficulty: it does suggest the basic reliability of the narratives, as do all apparent contradictions or difficulties. If the writers of the four Gospels were making their stories up in collusion with each other, they would certainly not have allowed such problems to stand. Matthew and John would not have allowed the contradiction between one person being forbidden to touch Jesus and others being permitted to touch him, or at least they would have provided some explanation. They would have settled on how many angels there were at the tomb and who saw them. They would either have explained why Jesus was not always recognized or else have eliminated this obvious embarrassment to their claims concerning the resurrection. The reason why these difficulties are allowed to stand is that, whatever the explanation of them may be and whether or not the disciples themselves knew the explanation, this is simply the way things happened. Consequently, they record them accurately as witnesses. The alleged discrepancies have the ring of truth about them.

Yet that does not help us determine how this verse should be taken. I would suggest that whatever the particular tone of the words may be and whether or not Christ actually ascended to the Father many times between his resurrection and final ascension from the Mount of Olives forty days later (I believe he did, though not for the reasons suggested by the first of the Scofield notes), the main sense of the passage is that Mary's relationship to Jesus (and also that of the other disciples) is now different. They are to know him in a different way than they did during the days of his earthly ministry.

Here a verse from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is illuminating. Paul says in the context of arguing that all things have become new for those who are in Christ, "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer" (5:16). To know Christ after the flesh is obviously to know him as the disciples did during the days of his earthly ministry—as a man whom they could hear and see and handle (cf. 1 John 1:1-3). To know him as we do today is to know him spiritually, that is, by the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit who reveals the Lord Jesus Christ to us as the Son of God and Savior. We notice, for example, that this is the emphasis with which this chapter of John ends, for John summarizes his account of Christ's works by saying, 'Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:30-31).

This means that Mary was now to know Christ as her Savior, and we are to know him as the Son of God and our Savior too. Do you thus know him? The Holy Spirit is given to lead you to that knowledge. Come to him. Believe on him. If you do not know him as the Son of God and your Savior, you do not really know him at all. If you do, then the other relationships follow.

God Our Father

The first new relationship which follows upon our new relationship to Christ is a vertical one. It is our relationship to God the Father. But we must notice that while it is analogous to Jesus' relationship to the Father, it is nevertheless not identical to his. It has been pointed out many times by those who have studied this verse that when our Lord said that he was ascending to the Father he did not say, "I am returning to our Father and *our* God." He said rather, "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." If he had said the former, he would have been putting himself on the same level as the disciples—as a man only. Instead, he indicates that while it is true that God has now become

our Father in a way that was not true previously, this is nevertheless not the same as his relationship. He is the Son of God in a unique sense, for he is God (cf. John 1:1-2; 10:30). We enter into an analogous relationship only because of what he has done for us through his atonement.

What is involved here is our adoption into the family of God. We are not naturally born into
God's family. We are alienated from God and are born outside it as heirs of sin and death. But
God is gracious; therefore, by the death of Christ and by the application of that death to us by the Holy Spirit, God brings us back into fellowship with himself and grants us family privileges.

Could anything be more utterly unexpected or overwhelming than the new relationship with God that is bestowed on his children? It is hard to think so. Justification is overwhelming enough, for it is all of grace. God did not need to justify us. Having justified us he could still have left us on a much inferior level of status and privilege. But he has gone far beyond what we could ever conceive of or expect by taking us into his own family where our status and privilege are that of daughters and sons. So great is God's condescension in this act of adoption that we would be inclined to dismiss this relationship, thinking it presumption, were it not that God has made a special effort to seal these truths to our hearts. As Paul has written, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:9-10).

What are these privileges? One is prayer, for access to God is based on our adoption. It is only because of our adoption that we can approach God as "Father," and it is only through the Spirit of adoption that we can be assured that he is indeed our Father and that our prayers are heard by him. This is what Paul is speaking of when he says, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father'" (Rom. 8:15).

A second and related privilege of our new relationship to God is that we can have confidence before him. We are his children, and we can know that nothing can ever destroy that relationship.

If God is our Father, he will help us in the days of our spiritual infancy, teaching us to walk spiritually and lifting us up when we fall down. If he is our Father, he will care for us throughout the days of our earthly pilgrimage and will abundantly bless us. As our Father, he will guide us in the way we should go and eventually bring us home to heaven to be with him forever.

Brothers and Sisters

It is not only that Christians have a new relationship to God as a result of his act of adoption. They also have a new relationship to one another. Before, they were outside the family of God, each going his or her own way in opposition to and sometimes in only thinly veiled hostility toward each other. Now they belong to a new family and must love each other and work together as brothers and sisters. "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household" (Eph. 2:19).

This is suggested by the word "brethren" in our text. It is a powerful and unexpected word, for it has not been used in this sense before in John's Gospel. The word occurs four times in chapters 2 and 7. But on each occasion it refers to those who were Christ's brethren according to the flesh, that is, to the children of Mary by Jesus' adoptive father, Joseph. In chapter 20, for the first time (and once more in 21:23), it refers to those who have believed on Christ and have therefore entered into God's family.

The attitudes that should flow from these new relationships do not always follow naturally or easily. But that is all the more reason to grasp this concept forcefully and work at the relationships. John White has put the task in these terms, 'You were cleansed by the same blood, regenerated by the same Spirit. You are a citizen of the same city, a slave of the same master, a reader of the same Scriptures, a worshiper of the same God. The same presence dwells silently in you as in them.

Therefore you are committed to them and they to you. They are your brothers, sisters, your fathers, mothers and children in God. Whether you like or dislike them, you belong to them. You have responsibilities toward them that must be discharged in love. As long as you live on this earth, you are in their debt. Whether they have done much or little for you, Christ has done all. He demands that your indebtedness to him be transferred to your new family."

Membership in God's family does not mean that we will be insensitive to faults on the human level. Indeed, we must be sensitive to them if we are to have any hope of reducing them and improving the quality of our family fellowship. But it does mean that we will not be overly sensitive to the faults of our brothers and sisters in Christ and even less that we will be critical. Instead, we will be intensely committed to each other with a proper family loyalty and will work to help each other live the Christian life.

Chapter 257.
The Best News Ever Heard

John 20:18

The story of Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene and his commissioning her to tell the disciples of his resurrection concludes with the statement that she did what he told her to do. This is deceptively simple because it is actually a record of the first announcement of the best news this world has ever heard. It was an announcement of the Lord's resurrection.

When World War II ended, the joyful news was flashed around the globe, and at once people everywhere were ecstatic. I was just a lad at the time. My father had been in the service for some years, and the family was then stationed at a large military base in the southern United States. We were far from the action. But even now I can recall the yelling and shouting that occurred when news came of the war's end. The ending of World War II was great news. Yet, great as that news

was, it did not compare with the truly stupendous news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This message was better then, and it is even better today.

Unshakable Evidence

Let me ask a very simple question and then give a few plain answers. Why is the resurrection of Jesus Christ the best news the world has ever heard? The answers are: because it is true, because it came after an apparent defeat, because of all that it proves, and finally because it demands a lifesaving response from each of us.

First, Jesus' resurrection is good news *because it is true*. It is always possible to have reports of events that sound like good news but later prove to be disappointments because the facts of the reports are wrong or the events did not actually happen. Referring again to World War II, this very thing occurred several times before the war really ended. False reports of the war's end spread; they were eventually proved false and so were terribly disappointing. The same was true of reports of a near end to the war in Vietnam. This was not the case with news of Jesus' resurrection.

We do not have space in one message to go into the evidences for the resurrection of Jesus Christ at length, but we can suggest a few of them. The first great evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the evidence of the narratives themselves. These stand up to the most stringent of critical scrutinies. To begin with, they are apparently four independent accounts. They were obviously not made up in collusion; for if they were, they would not possess the number of apparent contradictions they contain: the number of angels at the tomb, the number of women who went to the garden, the time of their arrival, and other things. These accounts can be harmonized, but the point is this: had the writers gotten together to make up a story, the apparent discrepancies would have been eliminated. On the other hand, it is also apparent that they did not make up the stories separately, for if they had done this, there would never have been the large measure of agreement they possess. The setting and the characters are the same, and the

sequence of events makes sense. What does this mean? Just this: If the accounts were not made up in collusion and if they were not made up separately, the only remaining possibility is that they were not made up at all. That is, they are four true, independent accounts by those who knew the facts they wrote.

Next there is the evidence of the empty tomb, coupled with the evidence of the moved stone and the undisturbed graveclothes. How are we to account for these things? Some have imagined that either the Roman or Jewish authorities moved the body. But they had no reason to do this, especially since it would have involved violating the officially sealed tomb; and, had this occurred, it is inconceivable that the true circumstances would not have been revealed later after the disciples had appeared in Jerusalem, proclaiming their belief in Jesus' resurrection. It would have been easy for Jesus' enemies to produce a body had there been one. On the other hand, the friends of Christ did not steal the body of Jesus, for they would hardly have been willing to die (as most of them later did) for a deception.

It is possible to add the changed character of these men as an evidence, for whatever happened turned them from disillusioned cowards into mighty proclaimers of the Christian message.

Then, too, we must add the fact that Jesus appeared, not just to one or two women in a garden under somewhat eerie circumstances, but to a wide variety of people in numerous circumstances. Paul lists many such appearances, noting that one time Jesus appeared to a group of five hundred believers (1 Cor. 15:6).

Again, one of the great evidences of the resurrection is the unexpected and unnatural change of the day of worship from Saturday, the Jewish day of worship, to Sunday in Christian services. Nothing but the resurrection of Jesus on Sunday explains it.

What are we to say of these evidences? Matthew Arnold, not overstating the case, once said, "The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best attested fact in history." Lawyers in particular have seen this truth.

Some of the best books on the resurrection have been written by lawyers, some of whom originally set out to disprove it. I am thinking of men like Frank Morison, Gilbert West, J. N. D. Anderson, and others. Sir Edward Clark, another English jurist, once wrote, "As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the first Easter day. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. ...As a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of men to facts that they were able to substantiate."

This is the first reason why the resurrection of Jesus Christ is good news. It is good news, not merely because it is a nice story which gives us an opportunity for a holiday once a year, but because it is true. As truth it is one of the most stupendous and important facts of history.

Wellington Defeated

Second, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is good news *because it came after an apparent defeat.* A victory is always good news, but news of victory after news that a battle has apparently been lost is even better.

Let me illustrate this by the way in which news of the Battle of Waterloo first came to England. There were no telegrams or radio sets in those days, but everyone knew that a great battle was pending and they were anxious to hear what would happen when Wellington, the British general, faced Napoleon. A signalman was placed on the top of Winchester Cathedral with instructions to keep his eye on the sea. When he received a message, he was to pass the message on to another man on a hill. That man was to pass it to another. And so it was to go until news of the battle was finally relayed to London and then across England. At length a ship was sighted through thick fog on the English Channel. The signalman on board sent the first word—"Wellington." The next word was "defeated." Then fog prevented the ship from being seen. "Wellington defeated!" The message was sent across England, and gloom descended over the countryside. After two or three hours the fog

lifted, and the signal came again: "Wellington defeated the enemy!" Then England rejoiced.

In the same way, Jesus' death plunged his friends into sadness. It was an apparent defeat. But on the third day he rose again in victory. When Jesus died men might have cried, "Christ is defeated, wrong has triumphed, sin has won." But after three days the fog lifted and the full message came through to the world: 'Jesus is risen; he has defeated the enemy."

Essential Doctrines

Third, the resurrection is good news *because of all that it proves.* What does it prove? The answer is: It proves all that needs to be proved. It proves the essential doctrines of Christianity.

In the first place, it proves that there is a God and that the God of the Bible is the true God. Reuben A. Torrey, who often spoke and wrote well on these themes, put it this way: "Every effect must have an adequate cause ... and the only cause adequate to account for the resurrection of Christ is God, the God of the Bible. While here on earth, as everyone who has carefully read the story of his life knows, our Lord Jesus went up and down the land proclaiming God, the God of the Bible, 'the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' as he loved to call him, the God of the Old Testament as well as the New. He said that men would put him to death, that they would put him to death by crucifixion, and he gave many details as to what the manner of his death would be. He further said that after his body had been in the grave three days and three nights, God, the
God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, the God of the Bible, the God of the Old Testament as well as the God of the New Testament, would raise him from the dead. This was a great claim to make. It was an apparently impossible claim. For centuries men had come and men had gone, men had lived and men had died, and so far as human knowledge founded upon definite observation and experience was concerned, that was the end of them. But this man Jesus does not hesitate to claim that his experience will be directly contrary to the uniform experience of long, long centuries....

"That was certainly an acid test of the existence of the God he preached, and his God stood the test. He did exactly the apparently impossible thing that our Lord Jesus said he would do.... The fact that Jesus was thus miraculously and marvelously raised makes it certain that the God who did it really exists and that the God he preached is the true God."

Second, the resurrection proves Jesus' deity. When Jesus lived on earth, he claimed to be equal to God and that God, this God, would raise him from the dead three days after his execution by the Roman authorities. If he was wrong in this, his claim was either the raving of a deranged man or blasphemy. If he was right, the resurrection would be God's way of substantiating the claim. Did he substantiate it? Did Jesus rise from the dead? Yes, he did! So the resurrection is God's seal on Christ's claim to divinity. This is why Paul, who knew that Jesus had been raised, writes that
Jesus was "declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). This is good news! If Jesus is God, then God is like Jesus. It means that God is not distant, arbitrary, or unreal. He is a God who loves us and who came to earth to give himself a ransom for our sins.

Then, too, the resurrection proves that all who believe in Jesus Christ are justified before God. Paul teaches this in Romans also, for he states that Jesus "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). How does this happen? Jesus had claimed that his death would atone for man's sin. He said that he had come "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). He died as he said. But the question still remained: Can it be true that the death of this one man is acceptable to God on behalf of others? Suppose he had sinned? In that case, he would have been dying for his own sin rather than the sins of others. Did he sin? Or was his atonement accepted? Three days pass. Christ rises. Thus, his claim is established. God has shown by the resurrection that Christ was sinless and that he has accepted his atonement.

Torrey said this: "When Jesus died, he died as my representative, and I died in him; when he arose, he rose as my representative, and I arose in

him; when he ascended up on high and took his place at the right hand of the Father in the glory, he ascended as my representative and I ascended in him, and today I am seated in Christ with God in the heavenlies. I look at the cross of Christ, and I know that atonement has been made for my sins; I look at the open sepulcher and the risen and ascended Lord, and I know the atonement has been accepted. There no longer remains a single sin on me, no matter how many or how great my sins may have been."

The resurrection of Jesus Christ also proves that the believer in Christ can have a supernatural victory over sin in this life, for Jesus lives to provide supernatural power to do it. This is an argument developed in the sixth chapter of Romans. In the opening verses of that chapter Paul writes, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Rom. 6:4). This means that by faith all who believe in Christ are united to Christ so that his power becomes available to them. We may be weak and utterly helpless, unable to resist temptation for a single minute. But he is strong, and he lives to give help and deliverance. Victory is never a question of our strength, but of his power. His power is what we need.

Torrey, whom I have just quoted, tells a story that illustrates this point. He tells of four men who were once climbing the most difficult face of the Matterhorn. There was a guide, a tourist, a second guide, and a second tourist, all roped together. As they went over a particularly difficult place, the lower tourist lost his footing and went over the side. The sudden pull on the rope carried the lower guide with him, and he carried the other tourist along also. Three men were dangling over the cliff. But the guide who was in the lead, feeling the first pull upon the rope, drove his ax into the ice, braced his feet, and held fast. The first tourist then regained his footing, the guide regained his, and the lower tourist followed. They then went on and up in safety.

So it is in this life. As the human race ascended the icy cliffs of life, the first Adam lost his footing and tumbled headlong over the abyss. He pulled the next man after him, and the next and the next until the whole

race hung in deadly peril. But the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, kept his footing. He stood fast. Thus, all who are united to him by a living faith are secure and can regain the path.

Finally, Jesus' resurrection is evidence for our own resurrection and of a life with Jesus in glory beyond the grave. Jesus said when he was here on earth, "I am going ... to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:2-3). He is preparing that place now. Can we trust him? Was he telling the truth? The resurrection vindicates these claims.

Come and Learn

I have given three good reasons why the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best news this world has ever heard: (1) because it is true, (2) because it came after an apparent defeat, and (3) because of what it proves. But there is a fourth reason also. Jesus' resurrection is good news *because it demands a lifesaving response in faith from each of us.* Have you responded in faith to this One who died for you and rose again on that far-off first Easter morning?

This is worth asking, because we recall that according to Mark's Gospel those to whom Mary first gave this report did not respond positively. They did not believe her: "When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it" (16:11). It was only after Christ's further appearances and a further proclamation of the message that they came to him.

There is some news that is restricted by its very nature. It applies to one or two individuals but not to everyone. A promotion is good news to the man who receives it but not to the two or three others who failed to get the job. The results of an election are good news to the winning party but not to the losing party. Even so generally applicable a report as a reduction of federal taxes is good only to those who pay taxes or who live in the country where the reduction is to take place. Almost all human news is so restricted. But the news of the resurrection is for all.

What is your relationship to the risen Lord? Have you heard the good news? Have you believed it? Have you trusted in him? This is the heart of Christianity. It is not to be found in the liturgies of the churches, nor in the specific formulations of Christian theology, important as they may be. Christianity is Christ, the risen Christ. He died and rose again for you. Won't you come to him?

Chapter 258.
The Real Last Words of Christ

John 20:19-20

I do not know who it was who first conceived the idea of preaching on the so-called "seven last words of Christ," but whoever he was, he certainly struck upon a popular note. From my early days I remember sermons preached on this theme, generally on Good Friday or during the weeks preceding Easter. No doubt you remember many such sermon series also. It has always struck me as a bit incongruous, however, that in speaking of the seven last words of Christ the choice has always been made of those words spoken by Jesus in the hours immediately preceding his death by crucifixion—"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34); 'Woman, here is your son" (John 19:26); "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43); "I am thirsty" (John 19:28); "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34; Matt. 27:46); "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46); "It is finished" (John 19:30)—when actually these were not the last words Christ spoke upon earth nor, for that matter, even the most significant.

To say that these sentences were the *last* words of Christ is to imply that with the speaking of them the words of Christ ceased. It is to say that there was no resurrection. Since this is wrong, I am going to suggest that in the closing chapters of John's Gospel we actually have a series of "last" words, spoken after the resurrection, which may be more

important and may have a greater claim to our attention than the sayings more commonly thought of.

What are these words? They are: "Peace be with you" (20:19-21); "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" (20:21); "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22); "Stop doubting and believe"
(20:27); "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed" (20:29); "Feed my sheep" (21:16-17; cf. v. 15); and "Follow me" (21:19; cf. v. 22). These seven sayings may be described as: a great bequest, a great commission, a great consolation, a great challenge, a great benediction, a great responsibility, and a great invitation. We are going to look at the first of these—a great bequest—in this study.

Shalom

John introduces this first great word of the Lord Jesus Christ by writing, "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, *'Peace be with you!'* After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord" (20:1920).

I know that when Jesus greeted his disciples by speaking of peace in the upper room on the evening of the day in which he rose from the dead, he used a very common greeting. The word was *Shalom.* It was often used the way we use the word "Hello." Still, there is more to it than that. For one thing, it was never used in a flippant manner. It did not mean "Hi." It was a serious greeting. For another, it was always related in some measure to the thought of peace being God's gift, and is therefore much more closely paralleled in English by the wish, "God bless you."

Moreover, in the New Testament the thought of God's giving peace to men is always connected with what Jesus accomplished by his death and resurrection. Thus, in the Book of Romans Paul writes of peace as one of the results of our justification: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus

Christ" (Rom. 5:1). It is certainly in this sense that Jesus uses the word in his greeting to the assembled group of disciples. He had gone to the cross. He had been raised from the dead. Now, as the result of what he had accomplished, he was dispensing real peace to those who believed on him.

What is peace? One definition applies the word to a relationship between countries, calling it "an agreement to end hostilities." Another calls it "public order." A third definition calls peace "harmony in personal relations." None of these definitions, good as they are, does justice to what Jesus really meant when he offered peace to men.

When Jesus spoke of peace to his disciples he was speaking, first of all, of peace *with* God. This is the peace bought by his suffering on the cross, and it is significant because of the fact that people are not at peace with God naturally. According to the Bible men are at war with God. They are opposed to him. Consequently, it was up to God to make peace through Christ's cross.

It follows from this that the peace must be on God's terms. Aboard the battleship USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, off the coast of Japan, General Douglas MacArthur, commander of the armed forces of the United States in the Far East, received the symbols of surrender of the Japanese people. Japan had been decisively defeated as a result of the war in the Pacific, and she surrendered on this occasion on America's terms. What would we think of a case in which the Japanese arrived at the peace table prepared to bargain on terms of a settlement? We would say, "How ridiculous! The time for bargaining is past." At this point, MacArthur was to dictate terms of peace, and the people of Japan were to receive them.

"Well," says God, "if you recognize this truth on the human level, recognize it spiritually. This is the way it must be between myself and rebellious, sinful men and women. People come to me to present their terms. They say, 'If you do so-and-so for me, then I'll serve you and we can get along together.' But there is no room for bargaining. If you want peace, you must receive it in the way I provide it. Jesus died to make

peace. If you are going to enter into my peace, it must be by faith in him and what he has done."

The wonderful thing is that when we come to God on such terms we find that he is not hostile. He is no longer looking toward us in wrath. There are no frowns. Instead, he receives us with smiles and makes us his daughters and sons.

The Peace of God

When Christ offers us peace he does so in another sense also. It is true that he offers us peace *with* God. This is what is mentioned in the verse I quoted from Romans: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (__romans__5:1). But it is also true—gloriously true—that he offers us the peace *of* God also. It is God's own peace offered to us. The Bible speaks of this peace when it says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

This was a wonderful word for the disciples. They had gone through the most traumatic week of their lives. For three years they had followed Jesus in and out of hundreds of villages in Palestine and had come both to know and love him. They had watched him do miracles. They had heard him teach. They knew that hostility was growing against Jesus on the part of the Jewish rulers.

They had warned him not to go to Jerusalem. Still they were unprepared for what happened. Suddenly, there was an arrest by night in the Garden of Gethsemane, and they scattered in fear, presumably returning in the dark to Bethany. Jesus did not appear. When these frightened men finally got to Jerusalem several days later, after much agony, they learned that the worst had happened. Jesus had been tried and crucified. Then, almost on top of that, and before they had even adjusted to the

thought of his death and burial, word came of an empty tomb and of several alleged resurrection appearances.

If ever there was an agitated and confused group, it was this small, fearful band of Christ's disciples. But then Jesus came! One minute they were alone. The next minute he was there. How glad they were to hear him calm their troubled spirits and still their hearts. "Peace! Peace be unto you!"

Do you know this peace? There is no peace in the world. Chamberlain promised the English people "peace in our time," but the words were scarcely out of his lips before Adolf Hitler was bombing Danzig for the start of World War 2. "Peace" was the cry of the students in the turbulent 60s, accompanied by their ubiquitous peace sign. But all the idealism, songs, drugs, and optimism of the decade did not create a peaceful world. We have had wars in every decade since, many of them —in South America, Africa, the Balkans, the Middle East, and other places.

This might not be so bad if it were possible for those who truly want peace to find it in the privacy of their souls. If only we could escape to a place of inner rest, away from those who hate peace and fight others for their own selfish gains. But that place does not exist, and the reason it does not exist is that we carry the seeds of turmoil in our hearts. Our basic problem is that we are not at peace with God, and deep within we know that this is the case. Moreover, this disharmony constantly breaks forth to disturb our relationships with other people and even our own personal repose. We are all agitated people. But Jesus made peace between his Father and all who trust in him by his reconciling death for sinners on the cross. Because those who know and trust Christ have been given peace with God they can now also experience peace with others and in the innermost recesses of their souls.

Do you know this peace? There are often difficulties in life. You may be experiencing some. There are upsetting events—the death of a relative or friend, the loss of a job leaving you without a sure future, the sting of

failure, the loss of friends. There are other causes of upset and agitation. Yet Jesus offers peace in the midst of them.

Many Gifts

We must not think that when Jesus spoke of peace to the disciples he was listing all the benefits of his death for them. This was only one of many gifts which are the result of his death and resurrection.

One of the additional gifts is *access* to the presence of God through prayer (Rom. 5:2). Prayer is not for everyone. There is not a line in the Bible to suggest that God listens to, much less answers, the prayer of one who is not a believer in Jesus Christ. In fact, the Bible states explicitly that the only way in which anyone can come to God in prayer is through Jesus. He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The best man or woman in this world is unable to come into the presence of God on the basis of any merit of his own. Yet, on the ground of the death of Christ, the worst sinner who ever walked the face of this earth but who has turned from his sin and accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior can come at any time of the day or night, any day of the year, and with boldness can speak out of the longing of his heart to God and receive what he asks.

The Bible also tells us that the death of Christ gives us a sure and certain *hope*. Hope refers to the future, more particularly to what lies beyond death. Before Christ died we knew nothing of what lay beyond. He said, "I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that where I am, you also may be" (John 14:23). He *said* these things, but we could not be certain of them. He died. Then he rose again. Now we have one who has passed through the portal of death and who has returned. It is as he said. There is a future. There is a heavenly home, and he has gone to make it ready for us.

Are these the only results of Christ's death and resurrection? No, there are more. He gives us the Holy Spirit. He gives us eternal life. We have

the Bible. We have a status before God as daughters and sons. We are heirs with Christ, coheirs with him of God's glory. We have his promises, among which is his promise to meet *all* our needs "according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

His Messengers

The final point of Christ's words to the disciples on the occasion of his first appearance to them after his resurrection was that they now had a job to do. Jesus said, "Peace be with you" (v. 21). This was for them. But if they had received God's peace through faith in his death and resurrection—as well as his many other gifts—they were nevertheless not at liberty to keep the good news to themselves. Now they were to become his messengers.

Have you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior? Is he your Lord? If so, this commission applies to you also. How will you heed it? Will you begrudge the time it takes, giving God the bare minimum of your effort? Or will you give him your entire self to be used by him as he desires? Only the latter course assures deep personal blessing.

There is a story told in folklore of a king who commanded his subjects to bring burlap bags to the palace. It was a peculiar request, to say the least, and naturally some of the subjects were offended. No one could understand why the king had commanded them to bring bags. Those who were offended brought the smallest sacks they could. Others brought old ones or ones filled with holes. When they arrived at the palace the king did not take the sacks from them. Instead he ushered them into his storerooms and invited them to fill their sacks with gold and carry it home. Those who had come resentfully with the smallest bags received very little while those who had brought the king the largest and best bags received more.

So it is spiritually. God asks for our all, but he does not do so to make us unhappy. His way is the way of blessing. God says, "Do not come to me with thimbles. Come to me with arms and hands wide open and see

if I will not fill them with every spiritual blessing. If you will be my messengers, I will make your life full and make you a blessing."

Chapter 259.
"So Send I You"

John 20:21

The last two chapters of John contain what I have called "the real last words of Christ." Spoken after the resurrection, as opposed to those more commonly discussed words spoken from the cross, they are words of encouragement, instruction, and promise: "Peace be with you" (20:19);
"As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" (20:21); "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22); "Stop doubting and believe" (20:27); "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed" (20:29); "Feed my sheep" (21:16-17: cf. v. 15); "Follow me" (21:19; cf. v. 22).

Our text contains the second of these last words, though, as we will note, it follows quite closely upon the first and leads to the third. It is John's version of the Great Commission.

The Great Commission occurs five times in the New Testament, once at the end of each of the four Gospels and once in the opening chapter of Acts. The repetition is significant. Anything God says is important; if something is repeated more than once, it is especially important.
Besides, in each case the emphasis is different. Matthew emphasizes the *authority* of the Lord. Standing on a mountain, presumably looking out over numerous towns and villages, Jesus says,
"All authority in heaven and in earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations" (28:18-19). In Mark the emphasis is on the *final* judgment: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; but whoever does not will be condemned" (16:16). Luke presents the commission as *the fulfillment of prophecy:* "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day; and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all

nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (24:46-47). Acts presents a *program for world evangelization:* "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8).

These words are drawn from a variety of circumstances and were spoken to a variety of people. John's version is unique in that it is probably the first expression of this command and links *our* commissioning to the prior commissioning of our Lord.

Peace Be with You

John's words are linked to the first of the seven last words, which occurs just two verses before.
Lest we miss this connection, John repeats it in the verse which is our text. The full text says, "Peace be with you. As my Father has sent me, so I am sending you."

This is not accidental. In fact, the reason is apparent. It is simply that we must ourselves have peace, both inwardly and outwardly, before we can effectively preach the gospel of peace to others. There are two kinds of peace involved here, as we saw in our last study. The first is peace *with* God achieved by the death of the Lord on our behalf. In ourselves we are not at peace with God. We are at war with God. But Christ has made peace by bearing the punishment due us for our sins. In bestowing this peace he provides us with forgiveness of sins and the assurance of it. The second peace is the peace *of* God. The disciples were cowering in an upper room. They were afraid, but Jesus told them to have no fear but rather to be of good courage. They were in hiding, but he told them to abandon their shelter and go out into the world as his missionaries. Christ's words seem to be the opposite of the disciples' experience. But they are reasonable because of who it is who speaks them. He is the risen Lord. He was arrested, beaten, crucified. But he rose again. It is as the One who has been triumphant over death and sin that he now speaks peace to his followers.

John Stott writes of this passage, "We learn then that the Church's very first need, before it can begin to engage in evangelism, is an experience

and an assurance of Christ's peace—peace of conscience through his death that banishes sin, peace of mind through his resurrection that banishes doubt.... Once we are glad that we have seen the Lord, and once we have clearly recognized him as our crucified and risen Savior, then nothing and no one will be able to silence us."

Into the World

The gift of peace is not the characteristic emphasis of this verse, however. Instead, as we have already indicated, the emphasis is on the connection between our commissioning and the commissioning of the Lord Jesus Christ by his Father. These words are a command to evangelize, but they are more than this; they establish a pattern for us as we evangelize. The key words are "as" and "so"—*"As* my Father has sent me, *so* I am sending you." They mean that our mission in the world is to be patterned on Christ's. He was the first missionary; our labors are to be conducted like his.

But what does that mean specifically? The first thing it means is that, as Jesus was sent "into the world," so also are we sent "into the world." This *context* is not made explicit in John 20, but it is clearly stated in that verse from Christ's high priestly prayer which is a close parallel to it. There Jesus says, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). This is the principle of incarnation, the principle of becoming one with those we would help. Think how significant it is that Jesus came "into the world." It means that he did not stay in heaven, though he certainly could have. It means that he did not shout words of salvation to us from the safety of heaven's ramparts. Having determined to come down to us, he did not even then come in the effulgence of his divine glory but rather divested himself of that glory and appeared in humble form. In fact, he did not even appear in a human disguise, which is what the Gnostics taught, but actually became a human being, just like us. He was born; he grew; he suffered; eventually he died.

That is what it means to come "into the world." Since this is the way Jesus came into the world, this is the way we are to come also. We are

to become one with those to whom we are sent. If we do not, we fail in carrying out the spirit even if not the letter of the Lord's commission.

Most of us are guilty at precisely this point, and the evangelical church in particular is guilty. We have retreated from the world rather than invading the world. We have retreated to the suburbs or whatever our equivalent may be. Schools, churches, magazines, institutions, individuals—many have done this. They have retreated to where it is nice or safe or nonthreatening, and as far as one can tell from their actions, what they are actually saying is that the world can go to hell. Shame on us! We spend millions of dollars to send faithful women and men overseas to tell the Good News there. But we will not go to our cities or neighbors if to do so costs us comfort or prestige.

Here is John Stott's statement of the problem. "I personally believe that our failure to obey the implications of this command is the greatest weakness of evangelical Christians in the field of evangelism today. We do not identify. We believe so strongly (and rightly) in proclamation, that we tend to proclaim our message from a distance. We sometimes appear like people who shout advice to drowning men from the safety of the seashore. We do not dive in to rescue them. We are afraid of getting wet, and indeed of greater perils than this. But Jesus Christ did not broadcast salvation from the sky. He visited us in great humility.... We cannot give up preaching, for proclamation is of the essence of salvation. Yet true evangelism, evangelism that is modeled on the ministry of Jesus, is not proclamation without identification any more than it is identification without proclamation. Evangelism involves both together."

Stott continues, "Frankly, this is my own greatest dilemma and problem as a parish minister. I love to preach the Gospel—to those who will listen to it. I find no greater joy in any ministerial activity than in the exposition of God's Word, whether to believers or to unbelievers, who come to Church (or even to open-air services) to hear it. But how are we to identify with the people of the parish who will not hear? That is the problem. How can we become so one with secular men and women,

as Christ became one with us, that we express and demonstrate our love for them, and win a right to share with them the good news of Christ?"

Do not think that I have a simple answer to this. I do not. I am ready to confess that this is also a great problem (and failure) for me as well. But while I do not know the full answer, I do know this: We are not really fulfilling the Great Commission until we live with, befriend, love, and enter into the experiences of those to whom we are sent.

If we are going to go into the world as Christ was in the world, we are going to have to learn how to become friends with unbelievers and then work out the issues of life by their side.

To Save Sinners

The second area in which our mission is to be patterned on the mission of Jesus is its *purpose.* We are sent into the world as Christ was sent into the world—that is context. But why are we sent into the world?—that is purpose. It is seen in Paul's solemn affirmation to Timothy: "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst" (1 Tim. 1:15). Christ came into the world to save sinners. And so must we, if we would be faithful to his commission.

This can be applied profitably on two levels. First, our purpose must actually be to see others saved and not merely to fulfill our duty as witnesses by unloading a certain presentation of the gospel on them. It is true that we cannot save anyone and that our duty in one sense is simply to be Christ's witnesses. We are to share the gospel with others whether they believe or not, knowing that ultimately the drawing of the unbeliever to Christ is God's doing. But this does not mean that we have no interest in whether or not they will believe or that we should not use every means at our disposal to see that they do. Do we talk too much? Perhaps. But it can never be that we overidentify or overwork while waiting for Christ to be formed in others by God.

Jesus said, "No one can come to me, unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44). But that did not prevent him from doing everything in his power to teach others and persuade them of the truth of the gospel.

The second way in which the verse may be applied is by stressing the word "sinners." In the first case, we stressed the word "save" ("Christ Jesus came into the world to *save* sinners"). Now we must say, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners."* Those who consider themselves theologians may be raising the objection, "But aren't all of us sinners?" Of course, that is true. But I remember as well that our Lord once said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:13). Jesus had been eating in the house of Matthew, the tax collector, and many of Matthew's low friends had come to eat with him. The Pharisees had rebuked Jesus for associating with such people. They thought that it was beneath his dignity as a distinguished rabbi. Jesus did not buy this line of reasoning. Instead, he taught that it was precisely to such persons that he was sent.

That is what I am talking about. I am saying that if we would go into the world as Christ went into the world, we must go to such people. Someone has defined a banker as a man who lends money to those who can prove they do not need it and refuses to lend money to those who do. That may be an unfair appraisal of the banking industry, but it is accurate where the philosophy of the world is concerned. The world gives to those who can give back—with interest. It expends praise, kindness, and generosity on those who do not need them. But this is not Christ's way. He went to the bankrupt. If this is his way, it must be ours also.

What would Jesus say if he were here to instruct us? He would say, "When you invite someone to dinner, invite someone who will not be able to invite you back." He would say, "Feed the hungry; give drink to the thirsty; clothe him who has nothing; visit the prisoner. None of these are in a position to return the favor."

There is one more thing that comes from Paul's statement. It is an explanation of why we do not naturally think as Christ thinks. Notice that when Paul said, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" he went on to add "of whom I am chief. "Jesus came to save sinners. Paul likewise went to sinners, and the reason Paul went is that he knew he was one of them. In fact, he was the chief. That suggests why we do *not* go. We think we are better than others and are concerned to maintain our position. We feel that we would have to stoop to save sinners, and we do not want to do it. Jesus had to stoop. He laid a real glory aside in order to become man and die for our salvation (Phil. 2:5-8). We do not have to stoop. We are beggars among beggars. Our task is that of one beggar telling another where to find bread. When we get that into our heads we will actually go to those who really need us and help them as the Lord did.

Glorified in Them

Not only is our mission to be like that of the Lord in its context and purpose, it is to be like his in its *goal* as well. What is that goal? Well, in John 17, in the midst of that prayer in which the Lord intercedes for us in regard to the lives we are to live in this world, Jesus said first, "I have brought you glory on earth," and then a little later added, "All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them" (vv. 4, 10). These verses and others teach that the ultimate goal of Jesus' coming was to glorify the Father, that is, to make his glory known. Then, because our goal is to be patterned on his, they likewise teach that we are to glorify Jesus by our thoughts, words, and actions.

This is our mission: (1) We are to go into the world, as Jesus entered into the world; (2) We are to go so that people might be saved through faith in him; (3) We are to glorify Christ, as he glorified the Father.

Some years ago Peter K. Haile, assistant headmaster of the Stony Brook School on Long Island, told a story that illustrates this point and gives a closing challenge. He had a missionary friend, a woman doctor, who went to India on rather short notice because of a pressing need in a

certain hospital. She had not had time to go to language school but instead was put to work in the hospital immediately, where she spoke through an interpreter. After she had been there a while she wrote to the Hailes expressing frustration and discouragement. She had been trying to show love and gentleness to the people, but they did not seem to be responding. She asked them to pray about it. A few weeks later another letter came, this time saying that she had discovered what the problem was. It was the translator. She had been loving, but he was apparently a rude, arrogant fellow who never conveyed her concern for the patients at all. He was a barrier to her message.

We are interpreters of the Lord Jesus Christ in this world. What is the picture of Jesus that others have through our speech and actions? What picture do they have of him in me? Do they see his glory? Or do they see my lack of concern, pride, and impatience? May God make us interpreters for Christ who present him as he truly is.

Chapter 260.
Sins Remitted and Retained

John 20:22-23

One of the points at which Roman Catholic and Protestant theology part company is over the interpretation of John 20:22-23. It is not a minor matter. Consequently, since I am a Protestant and since we have now come to this text in the course of our systematic exposition of John's Gospel, it is both necessary and proper to give the Protestant view of these verses.

We begin with the acknowledgment that there is much common ground between believing
Catholics and believing Protestants and that in many areas this unity is far greater than that between conservatives and liberals in either of their camps. For example, both believe in the Trinity with its corresponding assertion of the full deity of both the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Both believe in the virgin birth, works of healing, Jesus'

resurrection, other miracles, and the giving of the Holy Spirit to Christ's followers. We believe in Jesus' vicarious death for our sins, the inspiration and authority of Scripture, the visible return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and other doctrines. The scope of this agreement is suggested by the nearly universal use throughout Christendom of the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, which contain these teachings.

Nevertheless, there *are* differences; otherwise there would not be the various ecclesiastical and theological divisions we have. To name just a few, there are differences in the way we view church traditions, the doctrine of justification, the church, sacraments, and the role of the clergy (which is of particular interest here). On the basis of this text and some others the Roman church has built its doctrine of a special priesthood to whom has been committed the power of absolution of sin. In normal practice this authority is exercised through the confessional. Most Catholics would acknowledge that in the ultimate analysis it is God who forgives sin and that this is on the basis of Christ's death. But they would add that God does so in response to the action of the priest so that where the priest absolves, God forgives, and where the priest does not absolve, God allows the sins and judgment to remain. Protestants maintain that this is all backward. What happens is that God first forgives; then, on the basis of that forgiveness, believers (both clergy and laymen) proclaim that this is so.

The issues are the way in which forgiveness of sins comes to men and women, the role of laymen and clergy and the nature of the Great Commission with which all this is inseparably connected. It is the difference between absolution and proclamation, between the priesthood of the Roman church and the priesthood of all believers in Protestantism.

Divine Forgiveness

Why, then, does the Protestant church take these verses, the third of Christ's "last" words, as it does? Is it not simply twisting a text that in its clearest and simplest sense seems to be granting a special authority to forgive sins to a special body of chosen men and their successors?

Not at all. We maintain that this is not the clear or simple meaning of the text. Nor is it the theology of the Word of God generally. There are five reasons for thinking as we do.

1. It is a teaching of Scripture, reiterated on many occasions, that there is none who can forgive sins but God only. The power of forgiving sins is his prerogative. The clearest statement of this is from an incident early in Christ's ministry. Jesus had been preaching in a certain house when friends of a paralyzed man had lowered the invalid through the roof to Christ's feet. He saw their faith and said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). Some of the scribes immediately objected, saying (to themselves), "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (v. 7). This was a true principle. So the Lord used it to lead them to consider his claims to divinity. He showed that in this case the healing of the body and the forgiveness of sins would be identical; consequently, when he healed the man, as he then did, it was proof that he had power to forgive sins and was therefore God (vv. 9-10). The argument would be meaningless if human beings were able to forgive sins under any circumstances whatever.

2. There is no instance in any of the New Testament books of any apostle taking on himself the authority to absolve or pardon anyone. This is important because it relates to a fundamental rule of Scripture interpretation, namely, that every text must be interpreted within its historical and biblical context, and never in isolation. To interpret this text correctly we must ask what Jesus meant by it and what the disciples understood him to be saying.

Did the apostles understand Christ to be imparting to them the authority to forgive sins? Not at all. If they did, they would undoubtedly have claimed and exercised such powers, which we do not find. Instead, when Peter said to Cornelius, "All the prophets testify *about him* that everyone who believes *in him* receives forgiveness of sins *through his name"* (Acts 10:43), he clearly reiterated three times over that remission of sins is in Christ and by Christ. Similarly, when Paul said, 'Through

Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you" (Acts 13:38), he was pointing to Christ alone as the remitter. What the apostles did in these and other instances is preach the gospel, declaring with authority the terms on which God forgives sins, namely, on the basis of Christ's death and through faith in him alone. As John Stott says, "The Apostles understood that the authority the risen Lord had given them was the authority of a preacher and not that of a priest."

3. It is a fatal defect in the Roman view of the priesthood that believers other than the apostles were present on this occasion and that the authority here given, whatever it may be, must therefore have been given to them as well as to the apostles, and therefore to Christians generally. The reason for saying this is that the group to which Jesus spoke the words recorded by John was undoubtedly the same group about which Luke writes in the last chapter of his Gospel, and we know from Luke's account that it contained at least Cleopas and the other disciple who had been with him on the road to Emmaus (cf. Luke 24:18, 33; John 19:25), and probably others who were not apostles.

Moreover, this fits the context as a whole. For the authority to "remit or retain" is preceded by (1) the gift of peace, (2) the Great Commission, and (3) the impartation of the Holy Spirit, all of which are clearly given to all Christians. If the latter gift is restricted to a special order of clergy, then peace, the Great Commission, and the gift of the Holy Spirit must be restricted to them too. If they are not restricted, as they are not, then all believers can proclaim forgiveness through faith in Christ.

4. According to the best texts, the verbs "are remitted" and "are retained" are in the perfect tense, which suggests, though it does not prove conclusively, that the forgiveness involved is something which has already been determined in heaven and is now merely proclaimed on earth. The translations which best reflect this tense would be "have been forgiven" and "have been retained." The New American Standard Bible makes this explicit by saying, "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been

retained," and then by adding in a marginal note, "I.e., have previously been forgiven." The NASB does the same thing with Matthew 16:19 and 18:18.

5. The Greek words for "whosoever" and "them" (which refers back to the first use of

"whosoever") are plural. In other words, it is the sins, not of whatever person, but of whatever persons about which this verse is speaking. Leon Morris observes, 'Jesus is not speaking of individuals, but of classes. He is saying that the Spirit-filled church has authority to declare which are the sins that are forgiven and which are the sins that are retained. This accords with Rabbinical teaching which spoke of certain sins as 'bound' and others as 'loosed.' This referred to classes, not to individuals, and this is surely what Jesus is saying also."

We conclude that for the reasons given, John 20:23 is to be taken in precisely the way Luke records Christ's teaching given on the same occasion of which John speaks. Luke records that after Jesus had opened the disciples' understanding to know what the Bible had to say about his death for sins, he said to them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are all witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:46-48). In neither of these texts is anyone authorized to remit sins; rather all are commissioned to preach it on condition of repentance and faith.

A Few Conclusions

If this is the proper interpretation, as I believe it is, then a number of conclusions follow. First, the mission of the church in the world must contain involvement *and* proclamation.

In our earlier study of John's version of the Great Commission, verse 21, we pointed out that if we are sent into the world as Christ was sent into the world, then we must truly be *in the world* and not merely shouting the gospel to it from afar. This is the principle of incarnation.

It is important. Moreover, evangelicals especially must give attention to it, for we have been far too inclined to retreat into the safety of our evangelical ghettos and merely proclaim the Word abstractly or indirectly. We do not like to get involved, and the liberal wing of the church has been superior to many of us in this area. But this is only half of the story, for if it is true that Christians must be involved *in* the world if they are to reach the world, it is no less true that they must have a message *for* the world and actually proclaim it *to* the world if they are to fulfill the Lord's commission.

There is a tendency to glorify "dialogue" today in some circles. Those advancing this approach say correctly that we must be willing to sit down beside unbelievers and learn from them. But then they add, "We must listen to them without presuming to think that we have anything to say to them. We have nothing to teach them. We must let them teach us." In this they are wrong. Of course, we must be ready to listen to others and learn from others. The world has much to teach us, and we must learn from it if for no other reason than that we will thereby discover how to communicate the gospel better. But we cannot give up preaching. We cannot give up proclaiming the gospel of salvation that has been entrusted to us.

Second, the words of the Lord about the forgiveness and retention of sin throw emphasis upon what the Reformation theologians called the priesthood of all believers. In pre-Reformation theology the idea of the priesthood had been restricted to the clergy. These persons had special authority and prerogatives and were considered to be on a higher level than the laity. The Reformers denied that this was biblical and substituted instead a parity between clergy and laity in which there were no distinctions of privilege but only of office. In the teaching of the Reformers this meant that Christians had the same privileges before God. All had the same duties. All were to serve together within the one fellowship of the church. If a biblical distinction is to be made, it must be made between the *great* Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, and his followers—just as it may also be made between Jesus as *the* Prophet

and ourselves as lesser prophets or between Jesus as *the* King and ourselves as those who rule only because he rules.

We are not *the* priest, *the* prophet, or *the* king. But as God has sent Jesus into the world, so also does he send us into the world with the result that we are to function in each of these areas. We function as priests in offering ourselves up to God in service and in praying for and with others. We function as prophets in proclaiming what God has recorded in Scripture for our and others' benefit. We function as kings when we first rule ourselves well and then also those for whom we are responsible.

The question is, Do we who hold to the priesthood of all believers actually do these things or do we leave our responsibilities to others? Above all, do we take the gospel of God's grace in Christ to those who need to hear it and proclaim on God's own authority that those who will repent of sin and turn in faith to Christ as their Savior have had their sins forgiven and that those who will not come to Christ are not forgiven and will have to face God's judgment? Believers have many privileges. But they also have many responsibilities, chief of which is the faithful proclamation of the gospel.

Finally, there is this conclusion. We have pointed out that the privileges and duties of which Jesus speaks are for *all* believers, but we must also note that they are for all *believers*. Therefore, we warn that acquaintance with spiritual truth is not sufficient; membership in a church is not sufficient; the name of Christian is not sufficient. What is necessary is new life from God which inevitably results in a turning away from sin to faith in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior.

Here is where verse 22 comes in. It says that Jesus breathed on his disciples and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Some have imagined a contradiction between John, who apparently speaks of the impartation of the Holy Spirit to the disciples on the night of the resurrection, and the author of the Book of Acts, who speaks of a special coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost fifty days later. But this is unnecessary. Obviously the Holy Spirit came in power in a special

way on Pentecost to inaugurate the church age. But are we to suppose that there was no impartation of the Spirit or no working of the Spirit in disciples' lives before that time? Earlier in Christ's ministry, Peter had confessed that he was "the Christ, the Son of the living God," and Jesus had responded by saying that this had been revealed to Peter by God. Was this apart from the Spirit? Did Peter believe without the opening of his mind and heart by the direct action of the Holy Spirit upon him? Similarly, early on the morning of the resurrection, John had entered the empty tomb and "believed" in the resurrection. Was this insight achieved apart from the Spirit?

The Holy Spirit was there all along and would be so in even greater measure at Pentecost. What Jesus is indicating in our text is that he is the source of the Spirit and that nothing can be done in the Christian life (indeed, one is not even a Christian) apart from the Spirit's activity.

Christ's breathing on, and imparting the Holy Spirit to, his disciples reminds one of the creation, in which the almighty God breathed into the first man, Adam, so that he became "a living soul" (Gen 2:7). Jesus is teaching that we must be created anew if we are truly to be his and serve him faithfully.

All Things New

Have you been made new? If so, all things are new and God's blessings are yours in full measure. Arthur Pink sees this passage as presenting all those new features of Christianity that are ours through Jesus. "1. Christ is known in a *new way,* no longer 'after the flesh,' but in spirit, on High. 'Touch me not... ascended' (20:17). 2. Believers are given a *new title*—'brethren' (20:17). 3. Believers are told of a *new position*—Christ's position before the Father (20:17). 4. Believers occupy a *new place*—apart from the world (20:19). 5. Believers are assured of a *new blessing*—'peace' made and imparted (20:19, 21).

6. Believers are given a *new privilege*—the Lord Jesus in their midst (20:19).

7. Believers have a *new joy*—through a vision of the risen Lord (20:20). 8. Believers receive a *new commission*—sent into the world by the Son *as* He was sent by the Father (20:21). 9. Believers are a *new creation*—indicated by the 'breathing' (20:22). 10. Believers have a *new Indweller*—even the Holy Spirit (20:22). How Divinely meet that all this was on the *'first* of the week'—indication of a *new beginning,* i.e., Christianity supplanting Judaism!"

Has God made these things new for you? If not, you know the way. It is through Christ, who calls you to repent of sin and turn to him in humble faith. He died for you. Believe it and come to him.

Chapter 261.
Faithless or Faithful?

John 20:24-28

A number of years ago a book was published in America entitled *This Believing World.* It was a popular book because its thesis was popular—at last count it had gone through more than thirty editions. It said that everywhere and under all sorts of conditions men and women are naturally believers and are addicted to proclaiming their convictions.

The book may be right if the faith it speaks of is the kind of faith we observe generally. The world is not opposed to faith in general terms. But the book is fundamentally wrong if it is speaking of the kind of faith required in biblical Christianity. Christianity requires faith in God as he is revealed in Jesus Christ, and this means acceptance of the truth of our deep spiritual need and of the work of the divine Christ in providing the basis for our salvation from sin by his death.

It involves faith in him and in the demonstration of the truth of his work and teachings by the resurrection. Is the world a "believing world" in this sense? Not at all! In fact, the opposite is the case. The world is totally disbelieving, and it remains so unless God himself brings faith

out of non-faith, just as he is able to bring life out of death or the whole of creation out of nothing.

But, of course, that is precisely what God does. He not only creates and loves and dies that those whom he has made but who have fallen into sin might be redeemed, he also leads them to faith, thereby producing in them that which they could never produce in themselves.

This is the meaning of the great and moving story that is the true climax and end of John's Gospel.

Doubting Thomas

The story concerns the meeting of Jesus and Thomas one week after the resurrection. Thomas had not been with the others on that earlier Sunday when Jesus had first appeared to the disciples in the upper room. We are not told why. We are told only that Thomas was not there, had missed seeing Jesus as a result, and, when told of the appearances of the Lord, replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it" (v. 25). In the sequel Jesus appears to Thomas to lead him to faith, and Thomas concludes the story with the highest profession of belief in Jesus recorded in the pages of any of the Gospels. He worships him, saying, "My Lord and my God" (v. 28).

This story has given us the well-known English epithet "a doubting Thomas." But we have to be careful how we use it. For one thing, we must not use it to disparage Thomas as if he only (and not the other disciples or, for that matter, even ourselves) doubted the resurrection. We remember that none of the other disciples believed either until Jesus had revealed himself to them, and neither do people today naturally believe. That is why we speak of "unconditional election" and "irresistible grace." If we do believe, it is only because God is there beforehand leading us to do it.

Again, we must not use the phrase "a doubting Thomas" to suggest even for a moment that it is just natural for some people to disbelieve and that they are therefore less guilty or are to be excused because of this

disposition. We cannot fail to notice that although Jesus comes down to the level of his doubting disciple to lead him to faith, he does not at all suggest that his unbelief is excusable.

Thomas was indeed a doubter. He was not lacking in courage, loyalty, or devotion to Jesus, but he did have a gloomy disposition. He looked on the darker side of things. Therefore, when the death of the Lord was reported, he responded with the understandable declaration, "I will not believe it."

We see this characteristic in Thomas at every point at which he appears in John's Gospel. The first time he appears is in chapter 11. At this point Jesus was in a remote area of the wilderness country beyond the Jordan River where he had gone because of the danger in Jerusalem. We are told toward the end of the preceding chapter that when he had been in Jerusalem the Jews "tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp" (10:39). Word came to him that his friend Lazarus, who lived in Bethany near Jerusalem, was sick. At first Jesus delayed for two days. But at last he announced his intention to return. Undoubtedly the disciples were frightened. They reminded him of the danger. They said, "But Rabbi, a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" (11:8). Jesus was adamant. I imagine that there was a long pause as the disciples looked around at one another as if to ask if anything could be done to get him to change his mind or even if they would themselves go with him. But at last Thomas spoke up, saying, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (v. 16). What an interesting thing to say! The words were honest, loyal, and courageous, but they were not cheerful. They were quite grim.

The second time Thomas is brought to our notice is in John 14. Here Jesus is in the midst of his final discourses to his disciples before his arrest and crucifixion. He has spoken of heaven, concluding, "I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, so that where I am, you may be also. You know the way to the place I am going" (vv. 2-4). These were great promises. But Thomas was unwilling to let them pass without confessing that he and presumably others also did not really

know what Jesus was talking about. His gloomy reply was, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (v. 5).

Pink says of this incident, "He reminds us very much of John Bunyan's 'Fearing,' 'Despondency,' and 'Much Afraid,' in his *Pilgrim's Progress*—types of a large class of Christians who are [his] successors."

The Other Disciples

Before we think of Christ's appearance to Thomas we must notice something else, however, for in its own way it is also very important. Even before the Lord came to Thomas, the other disciples had gone to him with the message that Jesus was risen, and it was undoubtedly because of their witness, even though it was not believed, that Thomas was with the others when Jesus appeared on that second Sunday.

Those in the Reformed, or Calvinistic, tradition sometimes give the impression that, because people are hopelessly lost in sin and only God can save them, there is little or nothing we can do. Consequently, when a person will not believe or will not even come naturally into a fellowship of Christians where the gospel is preached and Christ is likely to make himself known, we tend to give up. We say, "There is nothing we can do now. It is up to God." Well, in a sense it is up to God; it is always up to God even when results are forthcoming. But the fact that men and women are lost in unbelief and that only God can save them is no excuse for us to do nothing. On the contrary, we must do as these early disciples did. We must seek out the one who is missing. We must go to him or her and call that one to faith. We must say, "The Lord is risen. We have seen him. Come with us and believe on Jesus."

If some of us were among that first crowd of disciples, I think I know what would have happened. Jesus would have appeared and gone, and the group that had seen him would have been discussing his appearance. The name of Thomas would have come up. Someone would have said, "What shall we do about Thomas? I suppose we should seek him out and tell him."

"No," says another, "he should have been here. He is one of us. His duty was to be with us. If he had been here, he would have seen the Lord too. It's just too bad."

Again, I suppose a sense of obligation might have emerged, but the announcement might have been done in this fashion. The "faithful" might have said, "Thomas, you should have been with us on Sunday evening. The Lord appeared (and he is probably not going to appear again), but we wanted to tell you this since it is our duty as one Christian to another. Mend your ways." They could have said this. But they did not. Instead, they were so filled with joy in the knowledge that Jesus was alive that they went to tell everyone, especially those who had been with Jesus during the earthly ministry. They sought out Thomas and made sure that he was with them when they gathered together to worship on the second Sunday.

There are Christians who have a naturally gloomy temperament. These tend to go off by themselves; this is a characteristic of that temperament. Yet these are the ones who can least afford to be alone. Gloom and despair prey upon them, and such people will become more gloomy and less believing if left alone. Go to them. Find them. Bring them back into that fellowship you enjoy.

Behold My Hands

It is true, however, that in spite of their concern for Thomas, and as important as this was, the disciples could not change his mind. Nor can we change the minds of other people or convert them. God must do that. So what we read next is that Jesus appeared to lead this doubting apostle to faith.

Jesus did it by inviting Thomas to perform his empirical test, that is, by coming down to his level and engaging him in a way that would best lead him from unbelief to commitment. Thomas had asked for something he had no right to ask for. He had said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails are, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it"

(v. 25). To treat the risen Lord in that fashion would be irreverent. Moreover, as he said it Thomas implied that the test was impossible; he had no intention of believing. Thomas was definitely out of line, faithless. Yet Jesus came down to his level, as he always does. He appeared to Thomas and said, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side" (v. 27).

How gracious our God is! We have no right to demand anything of him. Yet he who has created us and has died to redeem us stoops to provide what we need. Do we need evidence? If we do and if we will approach the matter honestly, we will find the proof of his deity, death for sinners, resurrection, and promised return overwhelming.

Do you say, "But I don't see it"? Then come to him. Ask for the evidence. You will find that God, who is far more anxious to reveal himself to you than you are to find him, will provide the revelation.

It is striking, however, that in this case the thing that actually convinced Thomas was not the empirical test he had demanded. He had demanded to put his finger into the holes of the nails in Christ's hands and thrust his hand into the wound in his side. But when Jesus presented himself and invited Thomas to reach out his finger and stretch forth his hand, Thomas did not actually do it. He was convinced without these assurances and fell at Christ's feet exclaiming, "My Lord and my God."

What convinced Thomas? Some have suggested that it was Christ's obvious knowledge of what Thomas had said, though Jesus had not been physically present when Thomas said it. To do that, so the argument goes, Jesus would have had to be God. But logical as this is, I do not find myself believing that this is what really got through to Thomas. What finally got through to him was the presence of Christ, identified by the wounds in his hands, feet, and side. It was the Christ of the cross who reached Thomas.

This is the greatest proof of all: the love of Christ revealed in his wounds. Charles Spurgeon once wrote of this: "In these times, when the foundations of our faith are constantly being undermined, one is

sometimes driven to say to himself, 'Suppose it is not true.' As I stood, the other night, beneath the sky, and watched the stars, I felt my heart going up to the great Maker with all the love that I was capable of. I said to myself, 'What made me love God as I know I do? What made me feel an anxiety to be like him in purity? Whatever made me long to obey my God cannot be a lie.' I know that it was the love of Jesus for me that changed my heart, and made me, though once careless and indifferent to him, now to pant with strong desires to honor him. What has done this? Not a lie, surely. A truth, then, has done it. I know it by its fruits. If this Bible were to turn out untrue, and if I died and went before my Maker, could I not say to him, 'I believed great things of thee, great God; if it be not so, yet did I honor thee by the faith I had concerning thy wondrous goodness, and thy power to forgive'? and I would cast myself upon his mercy without fear. But we do not entertain such doubts; for those dear wounds continually prove the truth of the gospel, and the truth of our salvation by it. Incarnate Deity is a thought that was never invented by poet's mind, nor reasoned out by philosopher's skill. Incarnate Deity, the notion of the God that lived, and bled, and died in human form, instead of guilty man,... is itself its own best witness. The wounds are the infallible witness of the gospel of Christ."

Do not misunderstand me here. If you have honest intellectual questions about Christianity, God will provide intellectual answers for them. He gave you a mind as well as a heart. He will provide what you need. But the thing that will ultimately win you is not so much the reasoned arguments, though they are often important stepping stones, but the love of Christ demonstrated by his death for you.

"My Lord and My God"

Here is some encouragement. We have been discussing Thomas, the most doubting of all Christ's apostles. But notice that when the Lord revealed himself to Thomas, Thomas moved from doubt to the greatest testimony of faith in Christ recorded by this or any other Gospel. He said, "My Lord and my God." "Lord" was sometimes used of Christ by

others, often with less than its full meaning. But here it must have all the content it will bear—'Jehovah, Master, Sovereign." "God" is a new form of address; no one had previously addressed the Lord in this way. It represents a great insight of faith, perhaps even greater than that similar confession of the apostle Peter for which he was commended by Christ (Matt. 16:13-17). Then, lest all this should be thought insufficient, Thomas adds the personal pronoun, saying, *"My* Lord and *my* God." It was not enough that Jesus be both God and sovereign. He was now to be that for Thomas personally.

This is the high point of the Gospel. It is the climax. John shows here how one who began as a great doubter came by the grace of Christ to that confession with which the Gospel began: "And the Word was God" (John 1:1). It was to lead people to this conviction that the book was written (John 20:30-31).

No case is hopeless. Your case is not hopeless. God took Abraham, the pagan, and made him into a pillar of faith and the father of his people. He took Moses, the stammerer, and made him into the greatest vehicle for the communication of the word of God until Paul. He made the shepherd boy David into a king; Peter "the weak" into Peter "the rock"; John the Son of Thunder into the apostle of love; Paul, the persecuter of Christians, into a faithful ambassador and martyr. He can do that for you. Allow him to do it. Believe on Christ. Rather than being faithless, may you be one who, like Thomas, was found "faith-full."

Chapter 262.
A Great Benediction

John 20:29

It is a remarkable characteristic of the Word of God that it is filled far more with blessings than with curses. There are curses, to be sure. There are warnings of judgment. But when all is put together, the

blessings are far more numerous and more wonderful than any of these more somber elements.

The Bible begins with a blessing, for we are told that after each day of creation God commented upon the work, saying, "It is good." The Bible ends with a blessing, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen" (Rev. 22:21). In between are such verses as: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it'" (Gen 1:28); "I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing" (Gen. 12:2); "After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him" (Gen 35:9); "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace" (Num 6:24-26); "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked" (Ps. 1:1); "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD" (Ps. 33:12); "Blessed are they whose ways are blameless" (Ps. 119:1); "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him" (Rom. 4:7-8; cf. Ps. 32:1-2); "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13). In my concordance I find 375 Old Testament passages that deal with God's blessing. I find 108 separate passages in the New Testament.

It is not surprising in view of this wonderful characteristic of our God and of his revelation to find that the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate God, also had many words of blessing during the days of his ministry. We think of the beatitudes of Matthew 5, an obvious example (vv. 3-11). There are blessings pronounced upon children (Mark 10:16), upon one or more of the disciples (Matt. 13:16; 16:17), upon faithful servants of God (Matt. 24:46), upon those who hear the Word of God and keep it (Luke 11:28). There is the benediction at the close of John's Gospel, which is our text: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

This blessing, the fifth of Christ's "last" words in John's Gospel, is great for several reasons, among them that it is the last of Christ's blessings spoken while on earth. Appropriately, it is one that concerns not just a

single person or a limited group of people but rather all who should believe on him as Savior.

What Does Christ Mean?

What does Jesus mean when he says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"? Does he mean that a subjective faith is better than an objective faith, that a faith that has no relation to evidence is better than a faith that has? Does he mean that only a faith like that is blessed? It is hard to think that this is his meaning, because he has just provided tangible evidence of his resurrection for Thomas by appearing to him and inviting him to put his finger into the holes of his hands and thrust his hand into Christ's side. Again, it is clear that John did not interpret Christ's words in this way, because immediately after this John says that he has written certain things in his Gospel in order that those who read might believe.

So we may grant that Jesus is not advocating a faith entirely without evidence. But that still does not answer the question. What does Jesus mean? I believe he is speaking, not of a subjective faith, but of a satisfied faith. He is speaking of faith that is satisfied with what God provides and is therefore not yearning for visions, miracles, esoteric experiences, or various forms of success as evidence of God's favor. More than that, he is saying that a faith without these things is not inferior to but is actually superior to a faith based upon them.

Take these things one at a time and see why this is so. Take *visions,* first of all. If you are a normal Christian, I am sure there have been times when you have been discouraged, perhaps overcome with doubt, and you have said, "Oh, if God would only reveal himself to me in some special way so that my sight, touch, or hearing could assist my faith." We remember that there were people in the Bible who had such evidence. Abraham saw visions; he spoke with the three angelic visitors; he heard the voice of God from heaven on Mount Moriah. Moses met God on the mountain; on one occasion Moses was hidden in a cleft of the rock and witnessed the fire, wind, and earthquake as Jehovah passed by. Isaiah had a vision of God high and lifted up. The

disciples saw Christ in the days of his flesh. Paul was caught up to the third heaven. John himself had the magnificent visions recorded for us in the Book of Revelation. "Why can't we have something similar?" we argue. "Surely we could believe much better and be far more effective in our Christian walk and witness if we did."

But that is not true, even though we like to tell ourselves that it is. For one thing, we usually want such experiences for the wrong reason—vanity. We would have a far higher opinion of ourselves if we should be granted an experience which most do not have. For another thing, visions do not necessarily lead to greater faith. In the opening pages of *Miracles* by C. S. Lewis, the wellknown Oxford professor and author tells of a friend of his who once saw a ghost. Before the vision, she disbelieved in an immortal soul. After it, she still disbelieved. Obviously, faith gives meaning to experience rather than the other way around.

Second, there are *miracles or* other special acts of God's providence. Do you pray for miracles? Do you think you could believe God better if you saw some? The opposite is the case. If you are looking for miracles (which God sometimes does provide, but seldom), you will gradually become insensitive to the thousands of normal evidences of God's mercy which you receive constantly.

Third, there are people who think they would be stronger in faith and be better able to live the
Christian life were they to have *some special esoteric experience.* We read a passage like 1
Corinthians 12:9-10, where Paul speaks of God granting to some "gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues," and we think that if we could only do or experience something like that, we would be stronger and happier as Christians. But that is not true either. God sometimes grants such experiences for the good of his church; the very fact that Paul lists these gifts in 1

Corinthians 12 is evidence that he does. But surely anyone who reads these chapters carefully will note that Paul does not encourage us to seek these experiences. If anything, he seems to warn against them, and he certainly does not pronounce any special blessing upon their exercise. Why? Because the blessings of the gospel are for those who live by faith and not by sight, who live by their faith in the character and benevolence of God and not in the evidence of visions, miracles, or other such experiences.

There is one other item which must not be left out, if only because it is so common in our day. It is the supposed evidence of *success,* measured by the number of people converted, church growth, income for Christian institutions and other such things. Does this mean that we are not to work to see as many people converted as possible? Does it mean that we are not to be concerned with church growth? Does it mean that we should not be concerned with the level of income necessary to run Christian schools, missions, churches, and other institutions? Not at all. But it does mean that we are not to tie our faith in God to such circumstances. We are to pray and believe and go on working even when we do not see this kind of numerical blessing.

What is faith? Faith is believing God on the basis of his Word and then acting upon it. This is true faith. It is this that God blesses. God promises a blessing upon those who have faith. We cannot repeat that enough. God blesses *faith,* and not the living out of some unusual experience.

How could it be otherwise if (1) God is to be fair in his dealings with his people and (2) the blessings of which he speaks are to be for all? Suppose it to be the other way. Suppose God's blessing were linked to the unusual. In that case, either his blessing would be for a small and select company only, or else the things we consider unusual would have to become commonplace, in which case they would cease to have the character of "special evidences." They would be like those other countless evidences of God's providence which we enjoy daily but do not regard so highly, simply because they are common. No, the blessings of God are for all; and they are based, not upon the unusual in

Christian experience, but upon faith which by its very nature and definition is common to all who call upon the name of Christ as God and Savior. This is why the Gospel of John ends on this note. It ends here because John wants to encourage everyone to believe on Jesus and enjoy God's blessings.

What Blessings?

What are those blessings? There are many ways to answer that question, because faith is discussed again and again throughout the Bible. But we may answer it at this point just from John's Gospel, remembering that John's Gospel is the Gospel of faith preeminently. In John the Greek word for faith (*pistis*) always occurs in its verbal form (*pisteuō*) and is therefore translated "believe." But in that form it occurs more often in John than in any other biblical book, even Romans (which has much to say about faith) or books that are longer. We find the word 101 times in John's Gospel, compared with a combined use of "faith" and "believe" 64 times in Romans and only 22 times in Mark. So John is obviously concerned with faith and considers it of prime importance. What does he say of the blessings that flow from it? The following ten items are prominent.

1. It is by faith that we become *children of God* and thus enter into the privileges of being in God's spiritual family. John indicates this at several points but especially in the first chapter, where he says, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (1:12). Certainly this is a great blessing and the source of many others that follow.

2. It is through faith that we have *eternal life.* This is the teaching of the best-known verse in the Gospel, John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Death is an "enemy" (1 Cor. 15:26). But death shall be conquered by faith, which unites us to Christ who conquered it.

3. By faith we are *delivered from judgment.* John quotes Jesus as saying, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes

him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (5:24).

4. John 6:35 teaches that faith ushers us into the blessings of *spiritual satisfaction* now: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." To come to Christ is to believe on Christ; that is what the parallelism suggests. So belief in Christ is set forth as the key to having all spiritual longings fulfilled.

5. Jesus also calls faith the means for entering into the final *resurrection:* "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (11:25-26). The blessings of the resurrection are for those who believe on Jesus.

6. Faith in Jesus is also said to be the way in which we become *blessings to others*, as the Holy Spirit who communicates all God's blessings works through us. This is taught in John 7:38-39: "'Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive." The image is of a broad river flowing through a desert land, giving life and joy to all who come upon it.

7. Through faith we see *the glory of God.* "Then Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?'" (11:40). Without faith we will be like the heathen, who are surrounded by the glory of God in nature, yet either do not see it or else attribute it to that which is not God by a worship of idols. It is only as we look to God that our eyes are increasingly opened to see what he is doing.

8. Faith is the secret of *a holy life.* Jesus said, "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness" (12:46). In biblical language, darkness is the darkness of

sin (cf. 1 John 1:5-10). So walking in the light means walking in holiness by means of the spiritual and moral life which God gives.

9. The blessing of *a fruitful and effective life* comes by faith. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (14:12). This does not necessarily refer to what we would call miracles, though taken together the disciples may well have performed more miracles than Jesus did. It refers rather to the many works of witnessing, preaching, and Christlike service performed by Christian people. They are performed by those who take God at his word and go out boldly to do his bidding.

10. Finally, it is through faith that we receive the benefits of *Jesus' prayers on our behalf.* He said, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message" (17:20). If, as we are told in James, "the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (5:16), how much more shall the prayers of the Lord Jesus Christ avail for us! If we lacked all other promises of blessing through faith, this alone should be enough.

Only Believe

What I have written here applies most directly to those who are Christians, to those who have believed on Jesus and to whom these blessings are therefore given. But it applies to nonChristians too in that you are challenged to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior.

Do not say, as many do, "I think I could believe in Jesus if he would just appear to me in some special way. I could believe if I had some miraculous vision." That is not true, though you may think so. Pharaoh did not believe though he witnessed the greatest collection of signs and wonders ever granted to one man at one period of history. Those things are of no use to you. The problem is not miracles or the lack of them. The problem is sin. You are a sinner, and Jesus is the answer to your sin. He died for you, bearing your punishment. Now you must come to

him in simple faith. You cannot see him. But you can find him if you seek him with your whole heart.

Chapter 263.
Why This Book Was Written

John 20:30-31

Have you ever read a book and wondered afterward why anyone would write it? I have read quite a few books like that, and I have thought of a number of reasons why they were written. Sometimes people write because their jobs depend on it. This is particularly true of professors in some colleges and universities. They must "publish or perish." If they don't, they do. Some people write because they think it is good for them to write. President Kennedy once gave Richard Nixon some advice along this line. He said it was good for a public figure to write a book, because it disciplined him to think and work in a certain way. Still other persons write as an ego trip. They want their names to be known.

These reasons for writing are largely unworthy, of course. But next to books that evoke answers like these are others so clear in their point and so helpful in developing it that their worth is immediately apparent. Such are the classics. Such is the Bible. So too is that one part of the Bible, the Gospel of John, which we have been studying.

Why was the Gospel of John written? The author tells us why in the verses that close chapter 20 and that therefore properly close the book (since chapter 21 is in the nature of an epilogue). John says, 'Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (vv. 30-31). John is saying that there were many other things about which he could have written but that the things he did write were chosen rigorously on the basis of a two-part goal. That goal centers in a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. The first part, the chief, is that those learning about Jesus might believe that he is the Christ, the

Son of God. The second part, a consequence of the first, is that the one believing might have eternal life through Christ's name.

Other Books, Other Authors

This is what sets John (and also the Bible as a whole) apart from most other books, including some very good ones. Many are written to glorify the writer. I think of a book entitled *Dear Me.* It was about the author. Other books are memoirs of famous people. John is not like this, however, and neither is the Bible as a whole. The inspired writers freely identify themselves. But then they lose themselves in their theme and never glorify either themselves or their achievements. On the contrary, if they speak of themselves at all, it is to tell of their own shameful failures that we might glorify God the more.

There is no example more striking in this regard than the apostle John. He was alert and sensitive. He was a member of the small band of disciples and had therefore traveled with Jesus during the days of his ministry. He was even a member of what we might call "the inner circle," composed of Peter, James, and John. John must have known more about Jesus by way of actual fact, sympathy, and direct experience than anyone. Yet so far was he from calling attention to himself or his own superior knowledge that he does not even mention himself by name while composing the Gospel.

Spurgeon, in one of his excellent sermons, points to the amazing reserve the apostle John exercised in refusing to use personal reminiscences and details to embellish his Gospel. "He omits, as if of set purpose, those places of the history in which he would have shone. He and James and Peter were frequently selected by the Master to be with him when others were excluded, but of these occasions he says nothing. At the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus it is said of the disciples, as well as of the relatives and the multitude, that the Lord put them all out, and only suffered the three to be with him. This was a singular honor, but John does not say a word about the raising of the daughter of Jairus.... Even more striking is the fact that the Master when he took with him the eleven to the garden, left the major part of them at the gate, but he

led the three further into the garden, and bade them wait at about a stone's-cast distance, where some of them heard his prayers, and observed the bloody sweat. John, who was one of them, says nothing about it. He leaves out that which would have brought John into the front, in order that he may fill up the whole foreground of his canvas with the portrait of his Lord. Everything is subordinated to the one grand end 'that ye should believe that Jesus is the Christ.'"

The purpose that John had and reveals so clearly should be the goal of every Christian. When John the Baptist was approached about the astonishing success of Jesus in gathering disciples to himself, he replied, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). So Jesus must. We must be certain that even in our witnessing we do not detract from him.

Another reason why many books are written is to satisfy curiosity. These books generally sell well because people have great curiosity about certain things. Over the years there have been scores of books by people who have worked for those who are famous and who pretend to let us in on their secrets. People buy these books because they want to know details about the lives of the people involved. But John, though he deals with the most famous person who ever lived, does not write in that fashion.

We would have. Had I been writing about Jesus, I would have recorded a physical description. I would have told how tall he was, how much he weighed, the color of his eyes and hair, and other items of that nature. I would have told of his childhood, his first friends, what people thought of him before he began his earthly ministry. I would have told what finally happened to Nicodemus (did he actually become a believer or not?), the reaction of the leaders of Israel to news of Christ's resurrection, and other such things. Our love for Christ tends to ennoble everything he did and would have caused us to be as faithful as Samuel Johnson's Boswell in recording it. But the Holy Spirit did not so lead the Gospel writers. As John indicates, he wrote only that which would

lead us to faith in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God, not to satisfy our understandable but useless curiosity.

Chain of Witnesses

Here is how John's concluding words must be taken. It is as though he is saying, "Look, you have been reading and studying my Gospel for some time now, and you have come to the end. Have you grasped my purpose? Can it be that you have missed it after all this time? In case you have missed it, let me spell it out, Jesus did many, many things, but I have not recorded all of them. I have recorded only a part. But I have recorded that part so that you, *you* might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life through his name."

Have you ever thought of the Gospel of John in that light? Have you noticed that for all its deep theology the Gospel is really nothing more than a series of testimonies to Christ?

Let us consider them in sequence. In the opening pages of the Gospel, after John's own introduction, we have the first testimony—that *of John the Baptist.* As John tells it, the leaders of Jerusalem came to the Baptist to ask who he was, and after denying that he was Elijah, "that prophet," or the Christ, John described himself as one who had come simply to announce the Messiah and point to him. The next day he had his chance. Jesus passed by, and John pointed him out to two of his own disciples, saying, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29). Later he formalized his witness saying, "I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God" (vv. 33-34).

The same chapter contains three further testimonies to Jesus. When John had pointed Jesus out to his disciples, they left John and followed Jesus. They then spent the rest of the day with Jesus and were so impressed that one of them, *Andrew,* immediately set off to find his

brother Peter and said to him, "We have found the Messiah (that is, the Christ)" (v. 41). In the next verses Jesus finds *Philip* and calls him to discipleship, and Philip then goes to call his friend *Nathanael.* Philip's words to Nathanael are: "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (v. 45). At first Nathanael is skeptical, but after he meets Jesus and is confronted with his supernatural knowledge, he declares movingly, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel" (v. 49).

In chapter 2 we have the first of Christ's many miracles, the changing of water into wine at a marriage feast in Cana. The climax of this story is verse 11, where we are told of the miracle's effect upon the *disciples* who alone of all the guests knew of it: "This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him."

The next two chapters introduce us to three representative figures and to others who are associated with them. They give their testimonies. The first figure is *Nicodemus.* He has little understanding; it is not said that he believes. But the account of his conversation with Jesus leads into John's own comments regarding the person and work of the Savior. He is described as "God's one and only Son" (3:18), whom God gave so that the world might not perish (v. 16).

The *woman of Samaria* dominates chapter 4. Unlike Nicodemus, who was a person of repute and privilege, she was an immoral representative of a despised race. She was also a woman. But Jesus revealed himself to her and led her to faith. Her testimony is in the form of a question that she asked the men of the city after she had conversed with Jesus. She said, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (v. 29). As a result of her witness many of the *citizens of Sychar* came out to meet Jesus and later said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world" (v. 42).

At the end of chapter 4 we have the story of the *nobleman* whose son was dying. Jesus healed the son by a word, without going to the home. The result was that the father "and all his household believed" (v. 53).

In chapter 5 Jesus himself lists the testimonies that were given to him, testimonies that God the Father provided. The first is *John the Baptist,* whose witness was that of a prophet inspired by God. The second is the witness of *Christ's works or miracles;* Jesus always attributed these to the power of the Father at work within him. The third is the direct witness of *God himself,* presumably by a voice from heaven. At last there is the testimony of the *Scriptures* that, Christ says, "are the Scriptures that testify about me" (v. 39).

In chapter 6 the *five thousand* are fed; the result is that many come to believe on Jesus. We are told, "After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world'" (v. 14). Later when Jesus refused to conform to the materialistic expectations of the crowd many of these disciples left him. But when he returned to his own small band to ask if they wanted to go away, these refused and instead gave great testimony to him. *Peter* was the spokesman. He said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (vv. 68-69).

In chapter 7 "many of the crowd put their faith in him" (v. 31). Some said, "Surely this man is the Prophet" (v. 40). Others said, "He is the Christ" (v. 41).

Chapter 8 also tells us that *"many* put their faith in him" (v. 30).

Chapter 9 contains the story of the *man born blind.* This man did not seek Christ, because he could not even see to seek him out. Jesus sought him, as he seeks each of us, and he restored the man's sight both physically and spiritually. The restoration of spiritual sight is seen in the man's growing awareness of who Jesus was and of his significance for him personally. At the beginning he calls Jesus "the man" (v. 11). Later he is "a prophet" (v. 17). Still later he concludes that he must be "from

God," for if he were not, "he could do nothing" (v. 33). At last, after Jesus had found him a second time and had revealed himself to be the Son of God, the man who had been born blind fell at his feet and worshiped him as "Lord" (v. 38).

Chapter 11 contains the account of the resurrection of Lazarus, and the result of this last of the miracles is that *"many* of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him" (v. 45).

In chapter 12 Jesus enters into Jerusalem on a donkey on what we have come to call Palm
Sunday. On this occasion *the people* who went out of the city to meet him cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!" (v. 13). Later in the same chapter we are told that "many even among *the leaders* believed in him" though they did not confess him "for fear they would be put out of the synogogue" (v. 42).

After the resurrection we have the experiences of *Peter* and *John*, *Mary,* the *disciples* as a whole, and eventually *Thomas.* The latter account concludes with the great confession, "My Lord and my God" (20:28). Clearly, from first to last, the Gospel is a testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The ABCs

I come now to the final and most important question: If John's purpose and the purpose of the Holy Spirit who inspired his writing is to lead men and women to faith in Jesus as the Son of
God and Savior, shall that purpose fail where you personally are concerned? Do you believe? You have undoubtedly known of Christ and his work for many years. You may even have followed these studies of John's Gospel over a long period of time. What a tragedy it would be to come to the end of such a study and fail to enter into eternal life through faith in Jesus yourself. Do not allow that to happen. Believe on him. Believe now.

You say, "What does that mean? What must I do?" I will make the answer as simple as I can. Think of it as the ABCs of believing. First, *A.* You must *accept* the basic teachings about Jesus of Nazareth as fact. That should be easy, for they are fact. The reason many doubt them is not because the facts are uncertain—they are as well attested as any facts of history—but because they have not really investigated them. If you have difficulty at this point, begin to study the Gospels and ask yourself if these teachings and narratives ring true. Are they consistent with themselves and with what we know of human life? Is Jesus believable? Second, *B. Believe* on him personally. This is more than merely believing facts. It is believing them in relationship to yourself. It is believing that he came to die for you, that he is the way to God for you, that he is your Savior. Finally, *C. Commit* yourself to him. At this point he actually becomes your Savior and your God, as he did for Thomas in the verses immediately before the text we are studying.

Will you do that? Do not put it off. People always find ways of putting off what they know they ought to do, particularly when it is good for them. Some say, "I would like more information." You have more than enough information right now. Some say, "I would like to confirm these things by some personal, emotional experience." God does not save by experiences. He does so through faith in Jesus Christ. Believe on Jesus. These things are written that you might believe in him and that believing you might have life through his name.

Chapter 264.
"It is the Lord"

John 21:1-11

At first reading, the final chapter of John seems the strangest in the Gospel, most of all because it looks as if it has been added on. The verses that end chapter 20 seem to mark an end to the book as a whole, and the confession of Thomas which comes immediately before them is obviously the climactic point of John's narrative. What can be added

after Thomas falls down and worships Jesus as "My Lord and my God"? The only thing that could possibly be added, according to our thinking, is an account of Christ's final ascension to heaven. But John 21 does not contain that incident. Instead, it deals with a miraculous catch of fish in Galilee followed by some words of Jesus to his disciples on that occasion. These difficulties, as well as others, have led some scholars to suggest that this last chapter was added to the Gospel (perhaps badly) by another writer after John had already finished it. Many have accepted this, although there is not a shred of manuscript evidence in the theory's support.

The key to understanding this chapter is to see it as a parallel to the first part of chapter 1. John 1:1-14 is a prologue, in which the *preincarnate* activity of the Lord is summarized. These verses, 21:1-25, are an epilogue. Their emphasis is upon the *postresurrection* ministry of the Lord in which he now rules his church and directs its members in their Christian growth and service. It would be proper to call this last chapter a pageant. It is history—the events and conversations really happened—but it is symbolic history by which the essential principles concerning Christ's rule over the church during this age are forcefully communicated.

We see in these verses: (1) the assembled church, (2) the possibility of serving Christ in the energy of the flesh, (3) the fruitlessness of such efforts, (4) the direction of Christian work by Jesus and the blessing that follows upon obedience to that direction, (5) Christ's temporal provision for his followers, (6) the only acceptable motive for Christian service, (7) the value of diversity within the church, (8) the importance of regular feeding upon the Word of God, and (9) the necessity for close personal discipleship for all Christians.

Christ's Own Together

The disciples had been scattering back to their accustomed haunts and homes after the crucifixion, and this had been true for some even after the resurrection. The shepherd had been smitten; the sheep were scattering. Yet here we find them in Galilee, where everyone knew them

and knew that they had gone off to follow Jesus, not scattering as we might think they would, but rather holding together as if they were still a special company with a unique bond. What can account for this? Alexander Maclaren writes, "There is only one explanation... Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. That drew them together once more. You cannot build a church on a dead Christ; and of all the proofs of the Resurrection, I take it that there is none that it is harder for an unbeliever to account for, in harmony with his hypothesis, than the simple fact that Christ's disciples held together after he was dead, and presented a united front to the world."

Moreover, it is not only significant that they were together. It is also important to note *who* were together. John says, "Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together," seven in all.

The names of Peter and Thomas, which appear in the first and second positions, are obviously significant. Thomas was the rank unbeliever to whom Jesus had appeared and whose story is told just verses before this. Peter is the denier who is to be recommissioned to service in the verses immediately following. Can we miss that the church is made up of those who were doubters, deniers, and sinners of many varieties, but who have been brought to faith by Christ and have had their sins forgiven? These are the ones who do Christian work—normal people, with all the failings we are heir to, not fictitious characters of superhuman faith and fortitude.

Again, it is not just Peter and Thomas who are mentioned. There is Nathanael, whose only other appearance in the Gospel is in chapter 1. This makes us think of chapter 1 and suspect that there may be a deliberate throwback to those opening narratives. Who took part in those narratives? Peter and Nathanael were two. We have reason to believe that John himself was another, being the unnamed disciple who, with his friend Andrew, first followed Jesus. In this last chapter John appears again as one of the sons of Zebedee. Is it not possible that the two unnamed disciples of chapter 21 are Andrew and Philip, who are

mentioned in 1:40 and 43 respectively, and that John is intentionally making this parallel?

If John is making this parallel, showing that the five of chapter 1 are here at the end also, then this is a testimony to God's perseverance with those who are his own. Those whom he calls follow Christ, and these are not lost. If these are not the same disciples as in chapter 1, we at least have an indication that all kinds of disciples (including some who are not even officially named) are in Christ's fellowship.

Without Me, Nothing

The second major point of these verses is one that evangelicals in the twentieth century especially should pay attention to: the sad possibility of attempting to serve Christ in the energy of the flesh and consequently of accomplishing nothing. This is what the incident involving Peter indicates.

Peter was impatient as usual. So rather than waiting inactively for the Lord's further appearances to him and the other disciples, Peter proposed to redeem the time by fishing. The idea seemed good to the others. So the disciples set out immediately and spent the night in hard labor. The text says, "That night they caught nothing" (v. 3). Some commentaries suggest that Peter was being disobedient to the Lord in proposing this fishing trip, because, so the argument goes, he had been instructed only to return to Galilee and wait there for Jesus. I do not think it is necessary to say this. Whatever else he was doing, Peter *was* in Galilee and he *was* waiting, though obviously filling in the time by fishing. No, the point of the story is not disobedience. It is rather to teach us what happens when we try to accomplish spiritual things by our own strength and at our own direction.

We must remember that fishing symbolizes evangelism, though Peter was obviously not thinking of this at the time. At the beginning of the three-year ministry there had been a similar incident. Jesus had been teaching the multitude while sitting in Peter's boat, and after he had finished he told Peter to move out into deeper water and let down his

nets. Peter replied that he had toiled all night and caught nothing. But he did what Jesus had said, with the result that his net now enclosed so many fish that it broke. Peter was impressed, and so were his partners, James and John. But Jesus said, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men" (Luke 5:10). From that time on, in the vocabulary of Jesus and his disciples, "fish" obviously suggested "men and women" and "fishing" symbolized "evangelism."

In chapter 21 we find Peter fishing again with similar results. He catches nothing until Jesus comes and directs his expedition. The point is clearly that our attempts to bring forth spiritual fruit are worthless unless Jesus himself directs and blesses them.

The Lord's Intervention

There is a third element in the story. The disciples had been fishing all night. They had caught nothing. I am sure, therefore, that having toiled all night and accomplishing nothing, they were discouraged and not even thinking of the Lord. If they were thinking of anything, it was probably how tired and hungry they were; if they were looking forward to anything, it was probably getting a bite to eat and then going to bed. But it was at that moment, when they were least thinking of Jesus, that the Lord appeared. They were not seeking him, but he sought them.

We never seek Jesus of our own free will, unaided by the Holy Spirit. If we do seek him, it is only because he is there beforehand moving us to do it. One of our hymns says it nicely.

> I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
> He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
> It was not I that found, O
> Savior true; No, I was
> found of Thee.
> Thou didst reach forth Thy hand and mine enfold; I walked and sank not on the storm-vexed sea; 'Twas not so much that I on Thee took hold, As Thou, dear Lord, on me.
> I find, I walk, I love; but O the whole

Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee!
For Thou wert long beforehand with my soul; Always Thou lovest me.

I am glad it is that way, aren't you? If spiritual blessing depended upon our seeking out the Lord, there would be no blessing. The reason there is blessing is that Jesus seeks us out, often when we least expect it.

The Lord does three things. First, he *asks a question.* The point of the question is to reveal to the disciples their own need and failure. Have you ever noticed as you have read through the Bible how God likes to ask questions? I think of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after they had sinned. God asks this question, "Where are you?" And later, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" (Gen. 3:9, 11). He asked the woman, "What is this you have done?" (v. 13). Later, in the account of Cain and Abel, when Cain was displeased that his offering was rejected, God asked, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" (Gen. 4:6-7). Through Nathan God asked David, "Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes?" (2 Sam. 12:9). God asked Isaiah, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" (Isa. 6:8). The Lord asked, "Who do you say I am?" (Matt. 16:15), "You do not want to leave too, do you?" (John 6:67), "Who is it you want?" (John 18:4), "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" (John 20:15). God did not ask these questions because he did not know the answers. He was not trying to figure out whether Adam was hiding behind the maple tree or the elm tree. God asks questions to get us to face the situation.

Thus it is in our story. Jesus asked, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" (v. 5). He meant, "Have you caught anything?"

They had to answer sadly, "No." They had to admit they were failures.

This is what Jesus asks us when we have been trying to go it on our own. "Have you caught anything? Have you been successful? Are you

satisfied?" He asks these questions so that we might recognize our hunger, need, and failure, and turn to him.

This leads to the next step in the story, for after having asked his question the Lord next *gives a command.* In this case he tells the disciples, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some" (v. 6). Why the right side? Because that was the side they were directed to by Jesus! If he had said the left side, there would have been fish there. They would have swarmed there from every part of the lake of Galilee, so anxious would they have been to be caught. The point is not *where* the work is to be done or *how.* It is whether it is being done under Christ's direction and in obedience to him or by our own wisdom and initiative.

Perhaps this is the point at which Jesus is speaking to you as you read this chapter. You have been aware of your own emptiness and failure. You have been trying to go it on your own and have been unsuccessful, as such attempts always are. Perhaps Jesus is saying, "I have a work for you to do. I have a way for you to do it. I want you to stop what you are doing and listen to me and do what I ask you to do."

Third, the Lord *sends blessings.* First, he had asked a question; second, he had given a command. Now in response to their obedience to his command, Jesus sends such a great catch of fish that they are unable to draw the catch to land. The fish (153 of them) symbolize men and women won for Christ. In the earlier story in Luke 5, the net was broken. Here it remains intact (v. 11), for none of those whom God has called and given to Jesus will be lost. Those whom *we* convert may well be lost; such are not true conversions. But those whom *God* calls to Christ through us will never be lost. These are given to Jesus and are held secure by both him and the Father.

A Great Discovery

There is one last point. In the middle of the story, when Jesus had first appeared on the shore and had called to the disciples, none of them recognized him. But when they obeyed his instructions and so

participated in the blessing of the great catch of fish, they made the discovery that this was the Lord. John said it first: "It is the Lord!" The others undoubtedly also recognized it in that moment.

Have you made that discovery? If you have not, I can tell you how it must be made. It is made as you obey Christ's commands. He may seem distant and unreal to you. That is natural, because sin separates us from him. But if you will obey him, he will work in your life and you will find him as surely as the disciples did when they obeyed him beside the lake of Galilee. Do you ask, "But what should I do? What does he command?" If you are a Christian, you must follow his leading as I have already indicated. If you are not a Christian, you must turn from your sin and call upon him as your Savior. The Lord said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). John says to believers, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteouness" (1 John 1:9).

There is no discovery greater than this. On one occasion a group of students asked the great doctor and inventor Sir James Simpson, the discoverer of chloroform, "What do you consider to be the most outstanding discovery you have ever made?" Simpson replied, "Young men, the greatest discovery I have ever made is that Jesus Christ is my Savior; that is by far the most important thing a person can ever come to know." It is true. Finding Jesus may mean a life of poverty, hardship, and even acute physical suffering. But it also means finding that One who alone is totally faithful as our Savior, Companion, and Friend.

Chapter 265.
"Come and Dine"

John 21:9-14

John's epilogue contains a fifth principle of Christian service, namely Christ's provision for his followers, suggested by the words "Come and have breakfast" in verse 12. I would like to consider this gracious

invitation in the context of four other "comes" scattered throughout the Gospels.

Come and See

The first invitation occurs early in John's Gospel. It is "come and you will see" (John 1:39). John the Baptist had been standing by the Jordan River one day when the Lord Jesus Christ walked by. John pointed to Jesus, saying, "Look, the Lamb of God." Two of John's disciples heard this testimony and interpreted it as a command to follow Jesus. So they left John and followed him. When Jesus saw them following he stopped and asked, "What do you want?"

They answered, "Rabbi, where are you staying?"

He said, "Come and you will see."

This invitation is far more than an encouragement to these two disciples to learn where Jesus was living. It is an invitation to come to him for salvation, discovering that he is the Savior. In this context the words have the same meaning as that great invitation of Psalm 34:8 ('Taste and see that the LORD is good"). The disciples came, tasted, and saw; then they went to their relatives and friends to say, "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41; cf. vv. 45, 49).

"Come and see." Of the five verses that we will consider, this is the only one that is directed to absolutely everyone. It is true that those who are not among the elect will not heed Christ's call and will not come. But this does not alter the fact that the invitation is to them as well as to all others. When God calls people to faith he is not mocking. He is issuing a genuine invitation, which is at the same time a command. If we do not come, it is not because we are not invited. It is because we are stubborn, sinful, and rebellious.

In his own valuable study of this verse and other invitations, Donald Grey Barnhouse notes that, in order that he might not violate human personality, Jesus graciously uses different methods to invite different people. We see it in John 1 but also throughout the book. When Andrew

went to find Peter and brought him to Jesus, Jesus confronted him by making a play on his name. Peter (or Simon) meant "a little stone" or "pebble," the kind of thing that could easily be kicked about, as Peter could be. So Jesus said, "Thou art Simon, the son of Jonah; thou shalt be called Cephas [which means] ... a stone" (v. 42 KJV). In this encounter Jesus showed his knowledge of Peter's name and character, even without being told about it. Moreover, he assumed the authority to change Peter's name, thus providing precisely the kind of leadership this vacillating disciple both needed and respected. He told him that he was going to turn Peter the jellyfish into Peter the giant.

Later in John 1, we read that Jesus calls Philip. Philip goes to get his friend Nathanael. Nathanael is skeptical and says, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"

Philip invites him to "Come and see," using the same invitation Jesus had used earlier.

When Nathanael does come, Jesus approaches him by showing his supernatural knowledge of what he had been doing even before Philip called him. He said, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you" (v. 48). Apparently this was what Nathanael needed, for he responded with a testimony of faith in Jesus: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel" (v. 49).

So it is throughout the Gospel. Jesus approaches each on his or her own level. He speaks to Nicodemus on the intellectual level, discussing epistemology (how one can know). He talks to the woman of Samaria on the level of her need as a sinner and in terms of an image she could well understand: "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst" (4:13-14). He meets the nobleman of chapter 4, the multitude of chapter 6, the man born blind of chapter 9 on the level of their physical need. At the end he reaches Mary by the utterance of her name—"Mary" (20:16)—and Thomas by the invitation to make an empirical test of the reality of his resurrection ("Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side," v. 27).

God is not touchy. He stoops to our level individually when he gives his call. Barnhouse writes, "I tell you, whoever you are, that God will meet you on your own ground. He will make himself so clear that if you say no to him, you will be a hypocrite when you are saying it. And forever after, you will never be able to look yourself in the eye again and call yourself an honest man." If you are new in your exposure to Christian things, you should begin with this open invitation.

Come and Learn

The second invitation is one of my favorites. It is one I frequently use in opening our morning worship services at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:28-29). There is a lot in this verse. There is a description of our need. There is a promise of rest, and that of two kinds: a rest that is given, corresponding to justification, and a rest that is found, corresponding to sanctification. But the part of the verse I am interested in is that which speaks of learning. It is the invitation to "come and learn" of Jesus.

This is the emphasis of the passage where these verses occur. Jesus had been preaching in his own area of the country, but most of those who lived there had not believed on him. They had rejected John the Baptist, an austere prophetic figure. They had rejected Jesus, who had come eating and drinking. But some had believed, and Jesus was rejoicing in them. He prayed, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure" (Matt. 11:25-26). Now, in order to follow up on these, he issued the invitation to "come and learn" of him.

Here is a wonderful truth. No one need be an intellectual giant to understand the gospel and become wise in spiritual matters. On the contrary, although the wise are not excluded, God has actually chosen

"the foolish things of the world to shame the wise" (1 Cor. 1:27). This happens when they come to Christ and learn of him.

If you will come, you will find that Jesus is a wonderful teacher. He is wise and kind. He is patient. He will teach what you most need to know. Moreover, if you will come to him and allow him to teach you, you will soon excel in that wisdom which is pleasing to God and, as Psalm 119 promises, you will have "more insight than all [your] teachers" (v. 99). I know many Christians who are like that. They have never taken formal academic degrees. Some do not even speak good English. But they are wise spiritually because they have learned from him who is wisdom itself.

Come and Rest

In Mark 6:31 we have another invitation: "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" In this context the disciples had been off on a training mission, and there had been so much "coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat." The Lord knew that they needed a vacation.

Every so often you meet some Christian worker who thinks that he has to do the whole thing by himself and who works so hard that he has a nervous breakdown. Usually a person like this has a theological reason for his behavior, for he believes that if he does not work at the pace he is working someone else might be lost. He thinks that if he does not speak to ten or twenty people each day those ten people may go to hell. He thinks that if he does not raise an extra hundred thousand (or two hundred thousand) dollars, workers will not be sent to certain fields and those who live on those fields will be lost. He carries this great burden upon his shoulders, and it is just too much for him. He breaks down under it. Where did he ever get that idea? It is not in the Bible. Salvation is of God (Jonah 2:9). We are responsible only to obey him.

I know someone will object, "But if people believe that, aren't they going to be lazy and fail to do what they should do in serving Christ?" I admit that many Christians are lazy. But it has not been my experience

that these are the ones who believe what I have been teaching. On the contrary, those with the highest view of the sovereignty of God in salvation are the most active.

Why is that? It is because they know what a great privilege it is to be associated with God in the work of evangelism, and it is because they know that their labors will be blessed as he blesses. Barnhouse writes on this point: "It is a tremendous thing to come into a recognition of this fact. Then you can do your work and when you've finished you say, 'Lord, it's up to you.' When you know that, you see, you don't have to go fussing and say, 'Well, now, could I have done it better?
Where could I improve?' The real question is: Were you yielded to the Lord? Did you ask the Holy Spirit to use you? Was there any part of your being that was not surrendered? If there wasn't, then you simply say, 'Lord, I am a pipe. I can carry the water. You're responsible for the pressure. You're responsible for the flow.'"

Come and Eat

The fourth invitation is the one found in John 21, which we are studying. It is to "come and dine" (v. 12). The disciples had been fishing all night and were hungry. But when they came to land they found that Jesus had already prepared "a fire of burning coals there with fish on it" (v. 9). He invited them to partake of it. Then we read, 'Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish" (v. 13). How like the Lord! Even in his resurrection glory he was not unmindful of the physical needs of his disciples, and he was active in providing for them. He continues to do so today. This truth enabled Paul to write, even while in prison, "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

This invitation involves fellowship with Jesus and not merely physical provisions. In the Bible eating always suggests fellowship. For us eating is often a hurried thing, something we do on the run to some other activity. We grab a sandwich and a glass of milk. We buy a hamburger and eat it in the car. This was not possible in Bible times. Meals required preparation, and they were more drawn out affairs.

Consequently, to eat with a person was to have fellowship with him or her.

It is interesting that the Greek word *koinonia* is translated by two English words, which have the same basic meaning. One is "fellowship." The other is "communion," as in the communion service. Fellowship and communion mean the same thing. Think of that now in relation to the communion service. We invite a person to communion, or we say, "I'm going to take communion." But what this really means is that we are going to take fellowship or that we invite the other person to fellowship with us around the Lord's table. What is the church but one great fellowship? It is a fellowship of Christians with the Lord and with one another.

We sing about it in one of our communion hymns written by the great Scottish divine Horatius Bonar.

> This is the hour of banquet and of song;
> This is the heavenly table spread for me;
> Here let me feast, and, feasting, still prolong
> The brief, bright hour of fellowship with thee.

Our Lord invites us to this table that we might fellowship with him and each other, in the communion service and in the daily exercise of our life together.

Some Christians are going to heaven miserably; others are going with the joy of heaven in their hearts and on their faces. What is the difference? The difference is that the latter have learned to come and dine with Jesus and with each other. The Christian life is not a showcase for superstars. It is a shared life in which our joy is in Jesus. If you lack that joy, take time to be with him. Turn off the television. Lay aside that worthless book. Forego that useless activity. Spend time with Jesus in the Word, preferably with other Christians, if that is possible. He will speak to you from his Word and show you the meaning of true Christian fellowship.

Come... Inherit

There is one more invitation. None of us has heard it yet, but we shall hear it one day if we are truly God's children. In Matthew 25, toward the end of that great sermon given on the Mount of Olives shortly before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus had been talking of the sheep and the goats. He described their separation into two groups, the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. He then continues, "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me'" (vv. 34-36). To those who have known him and been changed by him the Lord says, "Come... take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you."

We do not have much of an inheritance now. Or if we do, it is destined to pass away. All we know here, save the Word of God, shall pass away. But there is an inheritance laid up for us; there is a kingdom laid up for us. And we shall surely inherit both if we are Jesus' people.

I think here of 2 Timothy 1:12, in which Paul writes of his hope of this inheritance. The words come toward the end of his life. He has labored long through many hardships. He has been beaten, stoned, imprisoned. "Yet," he says, "I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day." Paul is saying that he has invested in Jesus. He has laid up treasure where "moth and rust [do not] destroy, and where thieves [do not] break in and steal" (Matt. 6:19). Now, as he comes to the end of a long life, he knows that the Lord Jesus Christ has not disappointed him.

Jesus will never disappoint anyone who trusts him.

Chapter 266.

Peter's Restoration

John 21:15-17

If each of us knew how sinful we really are, we would not be so shocked or subdued by our failures. But most of us do not know the depths of our own depravity. So we *are* shocked, particularly by a fall into serious moral sin or by our surprising ability to deny Jesus Christ.

When we sin in such ways, it is a tactic of the devil to argue that, having sinned, we have forfeited our chance for a successful and happy Christian life and that we might as well go on sinning. Like most of the devil's statements this is untrue. Though we sin, we have nevertheless not forfeited our chances for a full Christian life, nor dare we go on sinning. Instead, the Christian way is that of repentance and restoration. This is the point of the story of Peter's restoration by Jesus in John 21. Peter had failed the Lord in his hour of apparent need. He had abandoned him and had compounded his cowardice by a threefold denial that he had ever known him. Yet Jesus loved Peter, and Peter knew that he loved Jesus.

Peter's Boast and Fall

To understand the story of Peter's restoration we need to understand something about Peter's fall. Its cause was self-confidence, intensified perhaps by Jesus' revelation of his weakness. It had started in the upper room when Jesus had been speaking about love. Jesus had given his new commandment—"Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34)—but instead of this humbling Peter, as it should have done, it actually set him thinking how much he loved Jesus. Therefore, when Jesus spoke of going away and of the fact that the disciples would not be able to follow him, Peter rightly sensed that he was speaking of his death and expostulated, wrongly, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you" (John 13:37).

Jesus rebuked Peter by challenging his profession of loyalty: "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times" (v. 38).

I doubt if Peter heard anything Christ said in the upper room from that point on. He certainly did not ask any more questions, though he had been prominent enough in the first half of the evening's activities. The questions are now asked by Thomas and Philip. I suspect that Peter was stunned by Christ's prophecy and was saying to himself, "He is wrong. He has no right to think so poorly of me, nor to speak that way in front of the others. I will never deny him, no matter what the others do."

I believe this because the subject came up again after the small band had left the upper room and was on its way to the Garden of Gethsemane. Significantly, it was raised by Peter, which showed that he had been mulling over Christ's words in the mean time. Jesus was speaking of the scattering of the disciples, his crucifixion, and of his intention to gather them together again after his resurrection. But Peter broke in to say, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will" (Matt. 26:33). Jesus repeated his prophecy of Peter's denial. But Peter answered again, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you" (v. 35). According to Luke's account, Jesus told Peter that he had prayed for him that his faith should not fail. But in spite of these earnest words, Peter remained unconvinced and so went self confidently to his downfall.

Each of the Gospels tells us that Peter denied the Lord three times. While Jesus was on trial, Peter, who waited outside in the courtyard of the high priest, was declaring, "I do not know the man..... I do not know what you are talking about.... I am not his disciple."

Restoration

This is helpful for understanding the way in which Jesus approached Peter to restore him to service. The exchange has three parts. First, Christ's question. Second, Peter's response. Third, Christ's command.

The first thing we notice about Jesus' question to Peter is the name by which he addressed him. Jesus asked, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" (John 21:15). It was
Peter's old name, the name he had possessed before he met Jesus. We read about it in chapter 1. When Peter had been brought to Jesus, Jesus had greeted him by saying, "Thou art Simon, the son of Jonah; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone" (John 1:42 KJV). This was a play on words. The old name meant "pebble," a light, unstable thing. But Jesus said that he was going to name Peter "a rock." He was saying that he was going to turn Peter the jellyfish into a solid and courageous person. Now, in recollection of this earlier incident, Jesus goes back to the old name in order to remind Peter of his weakness.

The second thing to note about Jesus' question is the word for "love," which he uses. Again, there is a play on words, but it is lost in most English translations simply because we only have one word for love in English while the Greek has several. In the original of this paragraph there is a play on two of these Greek words. One word is *agapaō,* the great New Testament word for love; it is the word always used in relationship to God. When we read, "For God so loved the world" (John 3:16) or "God is love" (1 John 4:8), the word is *agapaō*. The other word is *phileō*, a human love expressing itself in friendship. We might say that it is the highest love of which we are capable apart from the new birth and the internal working of God's Spirit to form the character of Christ within us. We get the effect of the exchange between the Lord and Peter if we refer to the first of these loves as "one-hundred-percent love" and the second as "sixty-percent love." The exchange is as follows.

Jesus initiated the conversation by asking Peter if he loved him with the highest love possible: "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me with a one-hundred-percent love—more than these others?" Some commentators have suggested that as Jesus said this he waved his arm about over the lake and boats and other disciples, meaning, "Do you love me more than these *things?"* But in view of Peter's earlier protestations, it is

probably more specific than this. Peter had said that he loved Jesus more than the other *disciples* did and that he would prove it by dying for him if need be. He had made this profession just after Jesus had instructed the disciples to love one another with a "one-hundred-percent love." In view of this background Jesus is probably asking Peter, "Peter, what do you have to say now? You once boasted that your love for me was onehundred-percent and that it was greater than the love these other disciples have for me. Is it true?

Do you love me that way?"

Peter, now greatly humbled by his denial of Christ, replies with the lesser word: "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you with a sixty-percent love." That is a greatly subdued Peter. He is not saying that he does not love Christ. He does love him. But he is not boasting of his love, and above all he is not saying that it is greater than someone else's love. He is simply saying that his heart is open to Christ and that Christ therefore knows that he loves him with the best love of which he, a sinful human being, is capable. Before he had declared that Christ's "knowledge" of himself and the future was mistaken. Now he appeals to that knowledge as the basis of his confidence.

The second time the Lord asks his question of Peter he uses the same word for love again, though this time he mercifully drops the comparison: "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me with a one-hundred-percent love?" Peter replies as he did the first time, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you with a sixty-percent love."

The third time the question is asked the Lord comes down to Peter's level and uses Peter's word: "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me with a sixty-percent love?" This is as much as to say, "All right, Peter, I know you are incapable of the kind of love I have for you and that you are right in affirming only what you are able to do. But do you really love me even on this level? Do you really love me with a sixty-percent love?" Peter, who again has no confidence in his own ability even to see into his own heart, replies, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." When Jesus then goes on to give his command it is as much as to say, "All right, Peter, I'll work with that, because I am able to bring

that limited love up to the height I desire, the height at which I have ordained you to function."

The last thing we need to note about the Lord's question to Peter is its threefold repetition. Why did Jesus ask three times whether Peter loved him? The answer is obvious: because of Peter's threefold denial. Peter had denied three times. Now Jesus asks him to affirm publicly three times that he loves him. This is why "Peter was hurt"—"because Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?'"

Does it seem cruel to you that the Lord asked Peter three times in front of the others whether he loved him, in clear reference to his earlier threefold denial? It seemed to be; it was certainly painful. Yet in the ultimate analysis it was not cruel. The truly cruel thing would have been to let the matter go on festering in Peter so that throughout his entire life both he and the others would think that he was somehow inferior and unworthy of office though he had undoubtedly repented of the sin with weeping, as the Bible tells us. The kind thing was the public restoration so that Peter and the others would henceforth know that Peter's past was past and that the Lord had himself commissioned him to further service.

That is why the Bible calls for public confession of sin. God does not wish to be cruel to us, though the experience of confession is painful. It is to end the matter so that we can pick up and go on with Jesus.

Peter's Response to Jesus

Part of Peter's response to Jesus has been covered in looking at Jesus' question, the most important aspect being Peter's unwillingness to use Jesus' word for love. Peter had learned about himself from the experience. He had indeed fallen. But his faith had not failed, as Jesus said it would not (Luke 22:32). Now he was ready to strengthen his brethren.

There is another aspect of Peter's response that we have not adequately considered, however. It is Peter's repeated appeal to Christ's knowledge. In each case he answered Christ's question by affirming his love and

then saying, 'You know that I love you" (vv. 15-17). He might have said, "As I know my own heart, I swear that I love you." But Peter had said something like that once and had been dead wrong. Obviously there could be no confidence in his self-knowledge. What confidence there could be would have to be in Christ's knowledge of him—warts and all.

This seems illogical, of course. Peter was weak and sinful. He now knew this. Christ knew all things, as Peter had come to discover. How with that combination could Peter possibly be encouraged by an appeal to Christ's knowledge? It seems illogical, but this is actually the strength of one who has met Christ and known himself to be loved by him. Peter was a sinner. Yes! But a forgiven sinner. Therefore, though conscious of sin, Peter nevertheless knew that Jesus could look beneath the surface of his denial to see a heart that had been made new and truly loved him.

There is joy in an awareness of God's omniscience—for two reasons.

First, God knows the worst about us and loves us anyway. If God did not know all things, we might fear that someday something evil in us would spring up to startle God and turn his affection from us. He would say, "Oh, look at that horrible sin! I didn't know that was there. How terrible! That changes everything. I won't have anything to do with that person anymore." If God were not omniscient, that might well happen. But God knows all things. He knows the worst about us and loves us anyway. The Bible teaches that it was "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Second, since God knows all things he also knows the best about us, though others do not. The disciples might have been startled by Peter's defection. They might have said, "If Peter is capable of denying Jesus like that, who knows what other sins are lurking within him. He might even be a false disciple." But Jesus knew better. He knew Peter's heart and love. It is not surprising in view of this knowledge that Peter appeals to him.

Never say, "I can do it, Lord. I know I can. I know my heart." Say rather, "Lord, you know what is there. You put it there. You know what

love I have for you. Take it and make it into something that will abound to your glory."

A Gracious Command

The final part of this repeated exchange between the Lord and Peter is the Lord's gracious command: "Feed my sheep." I say it is gracious because it is not what we might logically expect. Peter had been a leader and then had fallen. For Jesus to come to him mercifully and tenderly to restore him was the height of graciousness. If, having restored Peter, he had said, "All right, Peter, you can go home now and do the best you can as an active layman. You are one of mine. I do not reject you. But, of course, I can never use you in a place of leadership again"—if he had said that, who could blame Jesus? Jesus would be entirely within his rights to answer like that. But this is not what he does. Instead, he tells Peter to "feed my sheep." Earlier he had called him to evangelism ("from now on you will catch men," Luke 5:10). Now he gives him the even greater responsibility of teaching those who have been caught.

What is the prerequisite for such service? What is the only acceptable motive for leading and teaching others? It is not moral perfection in the teacher; otherwise there would be no teachers. It is not an academic degree. It is not an overwhelming urge to "bring in Christ's kingdom," not the ability to raise more money than the man before, or build a bigger cathedral than the former minister. There is only one prerequisite. It is love for Christ issuing in the desire to serve him. "Do you truly love me?"

"Yes, Lord."

"Take care of my sheep."

This love does not get wrapped up in mystical experiences. It cares for others. John said it well in his first letter, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18). If we

love Christ, we will love those others for whom he also died and we will do our best to serve them in love.

Chapter 267.
Christ's Next-to-Last Word

John 21:17

The last two chapters of John's Gospel contain the parting words of Jesus to his disciples, which I have referred to as "the real last words of Christ." In doing this, I have contrasted the words spoken after the resurrection with those seven, more commonly studied words, spoken before. These postresurrection words are: (1) "Peace be with you" (20:19, 21); (2) "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (20:21); (3) "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22); (4) "Stop doubting and believe" (20:27);

(5) "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (20:29);

(6) "Feed my sheep" (21:17;cf.v. 15);and (7) "Follow me" (21:19, cf. v. 22). I have spoken of these as: a great bequest, a great commission, a great consolation, a great challenge, a great benediction, a great responsibility, and a great invitation.

As we draw to the end of chapter 21 we come to the sixth and seventh of these "last" words, and we notice something interesting about them. They are each repeated, the sixth ("Feed my sheep") three times (vv. 16, 17, and, with a slight variation, v. 15) and the seventh ("Follow me") twice (vv. 19, 22). The repetition grows out of the narrative, but it is significant in itself. When God says something once we should listen. When he says it more than once the words should command our prolonged, rapt, undivided, and obedient attention.

Christ's Sheep

We notice first that the sheep mentioned here are Christ's sheep, for he says, "Feed *my* sheep." They are his in two ways. First, by creation—he made them. Second, and even more importantly, by redemption. On an earlier occasion the Lord had said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). In speaking to the Ephesian elders just before his final departure to Jerusalem, Paul said, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). If the flock were ours, we could do with it as we wished or as we thought best. But if it is Christ's, as it is, then we must do as he wishes, recognizing our responsibility to him.

Peter understood this, for years later, when he came to give instructions to the leaders of the church, he spoke of their responsibility to the chief Shepherd as a motivation for the faithful performance of their duties. "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God

wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (1 Peter 5:1-4). There is nothing that will make us more diligent in Christ's service than the firm recognition that we are only undershepherds of that Chief Shepherd to whom the flock belongs and to whom we are responsible.

The Task Assigned

At this point we have a very big topic. We have "the sheep," the flock of Christ. We have the shepherd. We have ourselves as undershepherds. Even if we should restrict our attention to our own role as undershepherds, we could consider the many traits of character we must have to be effective in our assigned task or even the areas in which we must operate to fulfill it. As far as traits are concerned, we have the need for humility, hard work, self-control, temperance, gentleness, the proper management of one's own household, piety, and many other things that the New Testament mentions explicitly. Under the second category, we might consider being examples to the flock, exercising discipline and effective oversight.

But the burden of our text, while not excluding these other matters, is nevertheless more restricted. It tells us that our responsibility as undershepherds is primarily to feed the sheep which have been entrusted to us. How? By teaching, sharing, and in any other way communicating the Word of God. There is nothing else upon which Christians can feed. So our job is to teach the Bible both by word and example.

Here we must be very practical, for the difficulty at this point is generally not one of ignorance of *what* we should do but rather of *how* the task should be done. The principles that should govern our responsibility in this area are the same as those that should govern our own personal study of God's Scriptures. There are five of them.

1. We should teach the Bible on *some regular schedule.* We recognize this need in our own study of the Word of God, for one of the things we rightly stress in this area is the need for *daily* devotions. In the Lord's Prayer we ask God to "give us this day our daily bread," and while it is true that this refers to all our daily needs, physical as well as spiritual, it certainly does not exclude the need for a daily feeding upon God's Word. For this reason a popular devotional guide is called *Daily Bread.* Another, which makes the same point, is called *Manna in the Morning.* A third is *Daily Light.* Just as we each individually need a daily period of feeding upon God's Word, so should there be a regular teaching and communicating of the Word by all who are in positions of spiritual authority.

One obvious place for this is the preaching that goes on Sunday by Sunday in a faithful, Bibleteaching church. But that is only one area. Another is some kind of a weekly Bible study or Bible class. Some exercise this responsibility in a less formal way through work with neighbors or fellow employees. The point is merely that this must be regular. An occasional testimony does not fill the bill.

2. Our teaching or otherwise communicating the truths of the Bible should also be *systematic.* That is, instead of an occasional or random comment upon the Bible or an occasional, unrelated lesson, there should be an attempt to progress in a deliberate fashion through one or more books of the Bible or even through the Bible as a whole. Many people do not really study the Bible; they do not know how. They merely read it. This is not bad. It is wonderful. But it does leave a special area of responsibility to leaders to teach those passages.

I would suggest this procedure. First, present the book as a whole, reading it carefully together four or five times. Second, divide the work into sections, just as you would divide a contemporary manuscript into chapters (not necessarily the same chapters as in our Bibles), subsections within those chapters and paragraphs. Third, relate these

sections to one another, asking: Which are the main sections dealing with the main subjects? Which are introductory?
Which are excursions? Applications? This study should lead to a general outline of the book. Fourth, proceed to a more detailed study of the individual sections. Ask: What is the main point of this section? To whom is it spoken? How does it apply? What are the conclusions that flow from it? Finally, study individual phrases and key words. This kind of study will not be possible in every teaching situation, but it should be done by the teacher as preparation for his or her own teaching at the very least. To feed others we must first be fed.

3. The Bible should be taught *as comprehensively as possible*. I mean by this that we are not to become specialists in prophecy or Pauline studies or the nature of the flood to such a degree that we neglect the larger picture that those we teach obviously also need to know. The Bible is balanced in its many emphases. Christianity is meant to be balanced. If we do not study and teach the Bible comprehensively, we will become unbalanced and the church will be warped.

4. We must teach the Bible *prayerfully.* One obvious lack in the American church today is good systems of effective Bible study. But having said this, it is also necessary to say that we can have good systems, even superb and highly sophisticated systems, and still miss the point of Bible study by failing to ask God to speak to us through it. The scribes were great scholars, but they became mechanical in the working out of their method and so missed the Bible's main teaching. They failed to recognize the Christ when he came.

In Psalm 119 the author gives expression to the attitude we should have when he writes, "Do good to your servant, and I will live; I will obey your word. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (vv. 17-18). What will happen if our study and teaching is preceded by a prayer like this? Several things. First, it will make us conscious that we are actually meeting with God in our Bible study and not merely going through a prescribed religious ritual. Second, we will be sensitive to

what God is saying to us and will be able to alter our lives and behavior accordingly. Third, it will make us conscious of the needs of others so that we will be able to teach them effectively. There is nothing more exciting in our fulfillment of Christ's commission to feed his sheep than to know that God himself is actually speaking to us and through us to his people.

5. The final point is that we must study the Word of God *obediently.* When God speaks, he speaks for a purpose. He expects us to obey him. Do we obey him? If we do, our lives and the lives of those for whom we are responsible will be changed. Our churches will be changed, and so will our society.

A Word to Preachers

All this applies quite broadly, for there are very few of us who do not have some degree of responsibility for someone. We are all usually undershepherds in some way. But I want to say a special word to preachers, for the task of teaching the Word of God is particularly their own. The minister has many functions. He must administer, counsel, visit, and do scores of other things. But just as the primary responsibility of a carpenter is to build and a painter to paint, so the primary responsibility of a pastor is to teach the Word of God. Indeed, if he does not, how can he expect the other undershepherds of his flock to fulfill their share of this responsibility?

There is a decline in this area today due to a prior decline in a belief in the Bible as the authoritative and inerrant Word of God on the part of the church's theologians, seminary professors, and those ministers who are trained by them.

Inerrancy and authority go together, for it is not that those who abandon inerrancy as a premise on which to approach the Scriptures necessarily abandon a belief in their authority. On the contrary, they often speak of the authority of the Bible most loudly precisely when they are abandoning the inerrancy position. It is rather that, lacking the conviction that the Bible is without error in the whole and in its parts,

these scholars and preachers inevitably approach the Bible differently from inerrantists, whatever may be said verbally. In their work the Bible is searched (to the degree that it is searched) for whatever light it may shed on the world and life as the minister sees them and not as that binding and overpowering revelation that tells us what to think about the world and life and even formulates the questions we should be asking of them.

The problem is seen in a report of a panel discussion involving a rabbi, a priest, and a protestant minister. The rabbi stood up and said, "I speak according to the law of Moses." The priest said, "I speak according to the tradition of the church." But the minister said, "It seems to me...."

It is hard to miss the connection between belief in the authority and inerrancy of Scripture issuing in a commitment to expound it faithfully, on the one hand, and a loss of this belief coupled to a neglect of Scripture and an inability to give forth a certain sound, on the other.

Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones is one who makes this connection. He writes on the decline of preaching: "I would not hesitate to put in the first position [for the decline]: the loss of belief in the authority of the Scriptures, and a diminution in the belief of the Truth. I put this first because I am sure it is the main factor. If you have not got authority, you cannot speak well, you cannot preach. Great preaching always depends upon great themes. Great themes always produce great speaking in any realm, and this is particularly true, of course, in the realm of the church. While men believed in the Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God and spoke on the basis of that authority you had great preaching. But once that went, and men began to speculate, and to theorize, and to put up hypotheses and so on, the eloquence and the greatness of the spoken word inevitably declined and began to wane. You cannot really deal with speculations and conjectures in the same way as preaching had formerly dealt with the great themes of the Scriptures. But as belief in the great doctrines of the Bible began to go out, and sermons were replaced by ethical addresses and homilies, and moral uplift and socio-political talk, it is not surprising that preaching

declined. I suggest that this is the first and greatest cause of this decline."

So here is my word to preachers. You above all men have been given the task of feeding Christ's sheep by a careful, regular, and systematic teaching of the Bible, but you will never do this unless you are convinced of the truthfulness of every word you find there. So settle this first. Is this book the very Word of God in the whole and in its parts? Has God spoken infallibly in its pages? If not, seek another profession. If he has, then proclaim this Word with all the strength at your disposal.

"Feed My Lambs"

There is one last word based upon a slight variation in Christ's command between verse 15 and verses 16 and 17. It is a variation between "Feed my sheep" (in the second and third instances) and "Feed my lambs" (in the first).

I admit that this may be only a stylistic variation—many commentators say so. Again, it may only be a suggestion that all Christ's people are children—"lambs" as well as "sheep." But when I remember the concern of our Lord for children and the teaching of Scripture that children especially are to be brought up in the nurture and admonition of Christ, I wonder if Jesus is not saying clearly, "And when you are feeding my sheep, do not forget the children; in fact, begin with the children, for the kingdom of heaven is of such as these."

The church's best ministers have felt this and have thus spent time with children. I give two examples: Martin Luther and John Wesley. What did Luther do? He produced the Smaller Catechism which was especially for children. It was nonpolemical and presented the gospel clearly. Luther once said that he would be glad to have all his works perish except the reply to Erasmus (*The Bondage of the Will*) and this catechism. Wesley, who, like Luther, was greatly concerned for children, advised his pastors: (1) where there are ten children in a society, meet them at least an hour every week; (2) talk with them every

time you see any at home; (3) pray in earnest for them; (4) diligently instruct and vehemently exhort all parents at their own houses; and (5) preach expressly on education.

Such work is not glorious. It will not capture the world's attention. But it is a command of Christ, and the one who will do this will have the joy of knowing that in serving "one of the least of these" he has served Christ.

Chapter 268.
Roads to Glory

John 21:18-23

As I begin this study of Christ's words about the lives and deaths of Peter and John, I am reminded of the distinction the Swiss doctor Paul Tournier makes between the world of things and the world of people and of his emphasis upon the astonishing variety in the latter. When we look at the world of things—from the smallest grain of sand or rose petal to the planets and stars—we are impressed with the infinite variety. But on further examination we see that there is a remarkable sameness. Some objects are virtually identical—the grains of sand, for instance, or manufactured objects like cars, frisbees, or boxes of detergent sitting on a supermarket shelf. The world of persons is not like that. True, there are patterns that seem to repeat themselves. We have extroverts and introverts, active and lazy people, those who are mentally healthy (whatever that is) and those who have one or more mental disorders. But even in dealing with these general categories the thing that impresses the careful observer most is the uniqueness of the individual. People are different. A psychologist who classifies his patients too quickly is a bad psychologist. A person of whatever training who readily puts people into boxes is not wise but foolish. The reason for this seemingly infinite variety within the world of persons stems from God's purposes in creating people in his own image. Unfortunately the church, which should be most anxious to preserve

and develop this variety, is often opposed to it and instead attempts to force its adherents into the same mold.

Peter and John

It is precisely this problem with which the next section of Christ's conversation with Peter is concerned. Jesus revealed something of what was in store for Peter in his service for him. "When you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go" (v. 18). This is a prophecy of Peter's death by martyrdom, as John points out. It is as much as to say that Peter's former boast, which he had not been able to keep ("I will lay down my life for you," John 13:37), would be granted. Peter would die for Jesus.

Peter turned around, saw John following, and in full accord with the impetuous curiosity with which he was born asked, "Lord, what about him?" (v. 21).

Jesus replied, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me" (v. 22). In other words, 'John's form of service will be different from yours, but that is not to be your concern." We may say on the basis of this incident that we are not to be overly concerned with, still less judge another Christian's calling, but are to get on with our own.

Youth and Age

There are several differences in these verses, either stated or implied, the first being the difference between youth and old age. Christ speaks of that in the case of Peter alone, because he contrasts his youth, in which he freely did what he wanted, with his old age, in which things would happen over which he had no control.

What are the characteristics of youth? One of them is confident preparation for action, suggested by the words "When you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted." It is a

period of life in which bright plans are made and first steps are taken to accomplish those plans. Another characteristic of youth is self-reliance. Alexander Maclaren writes that self-reliance "is a gift and a stewardship given (as all gifts are stewardships) to the young. We all fancy, in our early days, that we are going to build 'towers that will reach to heaven.' Now *we* have come, and we will show people how to do it! The past generations have failed, but ours is full of brighter promise. There is something very touching, to us older men almost tragical, in the unbounded self-confidence of the young life that we see rushing to the front all around us. We know so well the disillusion that is sure to come, the disappointments that will cloud the morning sky. We would not carry one shadow from the darkened experience of middle life into the roseate tints of the morning. The 'vision splendid will fade away into the light of common day,' soon enough. But for the present this self-reliant confidence is one of the blessings of your early days."

There are weaknesses of youth, as we know. There is lack of experience and therefore often foolishness. There are passions of youth which need to be disciplined and challenged. But for all the weaknesses, there are still dreams and energies without which we would all be much poorer. Therefore, when we think of God's gifts to the church we should not forget the gifts of youth, nor should we despise them. We should not attempt to put old heads on young shoulders.

The other side of this contrast is old age, and the point about age that the Lord wishes to bring out is that things will be done to us against our inclination. In this case Jesus is speaking of Peter's martyrdom, presumably by crucifixion. This was not something Peter would have chosen for himself, any more than we would choose the sickness, limitations of opportunity, disillusionments, or other problems that frequently come with advancing years. Yet these were given to Peter (as to us), and they are as necessary for the church as the dreams of youth.

I notice one very significant thing about the way John refers to the prophecy concerning Peter.

He says, 'Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which *Peter would glorify God"* (v. 19). John does not say this about the dreams of Peter's youth but about his suffering. For "it is not only by acting, but chiefly by suffering, that the saints glorify God." When God spoke of Paul to Ananias he said, "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (Acts 9:16). It was in such suffering that Paul glorified God. The differences between youth, young adulthood, middle age, older middle age, and old age are God-given. We need the experiences of all and should not attempt to force the patterns of one age upon another.

Our Temperaments

The second area of differences is temperaments. In this passage there is a distinction between

Peter, the impetuous disciple, and John. Every time we see Peter we see him as a man of action. He is the first to speak and the first to act—not always wisely but always first. When Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am?" it was Peter who answered: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). When Jesus was being arrested, it was Peter who drew his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest (John 18:10). Here in John 21, after recognizing the voice of Jesus when he called from the shore, he immediately jumped into the water and made his way to Jesus. Peter is a consistent activist. John, on the other hand, is almost never the one to speak. He owns no sword. He cuts off no ears. When Jesus appeared on the shore and Peter jumped into the water to swim toward him, John remained in the boat and landed the catch that Jesus had provided. John is the thinker. Yet Jesus had a place for him just as surely as he had a place for noisy Peter. He teaches this by saying, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" (v. 22).

Forms of Service

This leads to a third area of difference among Christians, namely, our callings or forms of service. These involve our spiritual gifts.

I think here of that book by the well-known Chinese evangelist Watchman Nee, the title of which is taken from this passage: *What Shall This Man Do*? Nee begins by arguing correctly that the calling of God is always a distinctive calling. That is, it is never merely general, but is always personal in the sense that it is directed to a specific individual and has a specific service in view. "When God commits to you or me a ministry, he does so not merely to occupy us in his service, but always to accomplish through each of us something definite towards the attaining of his goal.... He calls us to serve him in the sphere of his choice, whether to confront his people with some special aspect of the fulness of Christ, or in some other particular relation to the divine plan. To some degree at least, every ministry should be in that sense a specific ministry."

Moreover, as Nee goes on to point out, because the ministries vary, so also will the gifts of those who are called by God to fill them. Nee demonstrates this point in a very interesting way. He takes Peter first of all, and he highlights his calling by the phrase "fishers of men." Peter's calling "was to bring men, urgently and in great numbers, into the kingdom." That is, he was called to evangelism. It is true that all Christ's disciples are called to evangelism but not all have this gift preeminently. Peter did. Therefore we find him being used to bring three thousand persons to faith in Christ at Pentecost, and later five thousand believed as a result of his preaching.

In the same way, we have those with the gift of evangelism today. We are all to evangelize. But a man like Billy Graham obviously has this gift to an exceptional degree, and he has been used much as God used Peter. If we look to organizations, we have Campus Crusade for Christ, which is clearly strong in this area. Crusade has mobilized hundreds of thousands to tell others about Christ. It may be true, and probably is, that the Graham crusades and Campus Crusade are not particularly deep where matters of theology are concerned. But I have no sympathy with those who look down on them and say, 'They don't present the gospel quite right; they don't have a proper presentation of the Calvinistic principles; the four spiritual laws are inferior to the five points." They

have been used by God and many have become Christians through them. We should rejoice in these great ministries of evangelism.

Second, Nee turns to the apostle Paul and describes Paul's calling as that of a "tentmaker." He means by this the task of building up or ordering the church of God. "Whereas Peter initiated things, Paul's task was to construct. God entrusted to him in a special way the work of building his church, or in other words, the task of presenting Christ in his fulness to men, and of bringing those men as *one* into all that God had in his mind for them in Christ. Paul had glimpsed that heavenly reality in all its greatness, and his commission was to build together the gathered people of God, according to that reality."

We have people who are called to this ministry in our day also. In discussing evangelism I spoke of Campus Crusade. Here we might discuss the work of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, which is strong on teaching and building Christian character. Again, this does not mean that Crusade has no concern for discipleship; it does. This does not mean that InterVarsity is not concerned with evangelism; it is. But I say this to point to InterVarsity's unique ministry in developing Christian habits and character through small, indigenous Bible studies and grappling with current problems in a scholarly way through its publication ministry. As we look out upon the church today we see literally thousands of leaders in key positions who have been trained by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. The same thing is true of churches. There are churches with the gift or evangelism. There are others—Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia is one of them—that have the gift of upbuilding. In Philadelphia we say that some are obstetricians; they bring the babies into the world. Others, like Tenth, are pediatricians; they nurture the child.

Finally, Nee gets to the apostle John, characterizing him as a "mender-of-nets," from that setting in which John is first seen and called by Jesus (Matt. 4:21). He means that John's specific task, exercised long after Peter and Paul had completed their work and had been taken to heaven, was to restore that which was being torn down. This may not be the best way to describe John's ministry. But it is true that he does do a work of

restoration. In contemporary life I would place such study centers as the L' Abri Fellowship in Switzerland, the Ligonier Valley Study Center in Florida, and the Traci Community of New Delhi, India, in this category.

"Follow Me"

There is this brief conclusion. I have written about the advantages of the various distinctions cited—the advantages of youth and age, those who are activists and those who are thinkers, the evangelists, restorers, and builders. But to be honest, we must also point out that each has it problems too. Those who are young tend to be foolish in their headstrong self-reliance. The old tend to become concerned with their own affairs and therefore selfish. The weakness of the activist is insensitivity to others who move at slower paces. The thinker can become lazy. The evangelist can become shallow. The builder or restorer can become critical of those whom he regards as inferior. The advantages of each age, temperament, or calling can easily be marred by sin.

But there is a solution. It is the solution Jesus told Peter (and presumably John as well): "Follow me." Why is this a solution? First, because if we are following Jesus, then our eyes will be on Jesus and he —not our own particular and imperfect form of it—will be seen as the standard of Christian service. If you have your eyes on yourself, you expect people to measure up to you and judge them to be inferior if they do not. With your eyes on Jesus, he becomes the standard for both you and them and he actually draws you together rather than allows you to be driven apart. I was walking along the street once, following another person. I turned aside much as Peter did when, looking away from Jesus, he saw what John was doing and I bumped into a telephone pole. We will bump into one pole or another if we take our eyes off Jesus.

Second, if we have our eyes on Jesus, we will see not only something about him but something about ourselves as well. What we will see about ourselves is that we are at best "unprofitable servants." There will be no room for boasting, no room for arrogant self-sufficiency. We are

inadequate, unprofitable. What we need is Christ ... in his own person, first of all, and also in one another.

Chapter 269.
Christ's Last Word

John 21:22

The last recorded words that Jesus spoke before his ascension are found at the beginning of the Book of Acts. They contain the promise of power through the Holy Spirit and the command to go into all the world with the gospel. But these are not the last words of Christ recorded in John's
Gospel. It is not that John did not know of Christ's teaching on these other points. The fourth Gospel contains more instruction about the Holy Spirit than any other Gospel, and it contains its own version of the Great Commission ("As my Father has sent me, so I am sending you," 20:21).
It is rather that John wished to emphasize Christ's call to discipleship as the Gospel closes. In John's Gospel the last words of Christ are: "Follow me."

Strikingly, these are also nearly the first words of Christ in this Gospel. John first quotes Christ in connection with the episode in which Andrew and the other unnamed disciple follow Jesus at the direction of John the Baptist. Jesus' first words to them are: "What do you want?" (1:38). But as soon as they reply by asking where he is spending the night, he answers by the first of his great invitations: "Come and see" (v. 39). This is an invitation to discipleship. But lest we should miss this, Christ's next utterance, an invitation to Philip, is literally "Follow me" (v. 43).

In a very real sense, then, these are the first and last words of Christ in John's Gospel. They are a reminder that Christianity is Christ, not just believing in some abstract sense, but believing in him to the point of turning our back on all else to follow him.

Self-Denial

These seventh and last words of Christ may be difficult to obey, as we will see. But they are not difficult to interpret if for no other reason than that Jesus himself supplies the interpretation in other places. The key passage is Luke 9:23-25 (and the parallel, Mark 8:34-37). Here Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?"

These words, like John 21:19-22, are an invitation to follow Jesus. But, unlike the verses in John, they explain what such discipleship means. Specifically, they teach that discipleship means (1) self-denial and (2) taking up one's cross in Christ's service.

The first point, self-denial, should not be difficult for any true Christian to understand, for this is where Christianity begins. To be a Christian means to have turned our back on any attempt to please God through our own human abilities and efforts and instead to have accepted by faith what God has done in Christ for our salvation. We cannot save ourselves. So becoming a Christian means dying to those old, worthless efforts to merit something from God. It means saying no to them in order that we might receive salvation as God's free gift. Christianity begins with self-denial. So in one sense the Christian life is merely continuing on in the way we have started. It is turning our back on self to follow Jesus.

This does not mean that it is easy to do, however, as I have already pointed out. We are surrounded by a world that says no to nothing. It tells us that saying yes to every desire and whim we have is not only good for us but also good for others (because we will be nicer people for them to know) and for the economy (because the world is supposed to thrive by selfindulgence). In the midst of such a culture, the word of Jesus seems unrealistic and austere, and if it does not seem austere, "we

are not really letting it speak to us," as Francis Schaeffer observes in his study of *True Spirituality.*

What does it mean to deny oneself in order to be Christ's disciple? The first thing it means is that we must *renounce sin.* That is, we must repent of sin and determine to go in the holy way which Christ set before us. John Stott writes of this first step, "Renunciation of sin... can in no circumstances be bypassed. Repentance and faith belong together. We cannot follow Christ without forsaking sin. Moreover, repentance is a definite turn from every thought, word, deed and habit which is known to be wrong. It is not sufficient to feel pangs of remorse or to make some kind of apology to God. Fundamentally, repentance is a matter neither of emotion nor of speech. It is an inward change of mind and attitude towards sin which leads to a change of behavior. There can be no compromise here. There may be sins in our lives which we do not think we ever could renounce; but we must be *willing* to let them go as we cry to God for deliverance from them."

This is not a general renunciation. It is as specific as specific sins. It is a renunciation of anything that is contrary to God's revelation of himself; that is, anything contrary to the Bible. Take the Ten Commandments as one area in which renunciation of sin may be tested. The first commandment says, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:3). Here is an obvious negative. It tells us that we are to say no to anything that would take God's rightful place in our lives. Is it an actual idol? We must say no to the idol; we must burn it or destroy it, as many primitive people have done when they have responded to the gospel. Is it money? We must get rid of the money, for it is better to be poor and a close follower of Christ than rich and far from him. Money is not something that necessarily takes the place of God in a life. It is possible to be a devoted and deeply spiritual Christian and rich at the same time. But if money has become a god, then we must say no to it. Has another person taken the place of God? Has a business? An ambition? Your children? Fame? Achievement? Whatever it is, we must say no to it if it is keeping us from Christ.

We must test ourselves on each of the other commandments. "Thou shalt not kill." This means that we are to say no to any desire to take another's life or slander another's reputation. "Thou shalt not commit adultery." We are to say no to any desire to take another man's wife or another woman's husband. "Thou shalt not steal." We must say no to the desire to take someone else's property. If we have not said no at these points, we can hardly pretend that we are living in the newness of Christ's resurrection life. Indeed, we are not living the life of Christ at all.

The second thing self-denial involves is *renunciation of anything that is not God's will for our lives.* This is related to the previous point about sin, for sin is not God's will and must be renounced. But there are things that are not contrary to the Bible's moral code, yet because they are not God's will for us personally they must be renounced too in order that we might do his will for us. For instance, there is nothing wrong with marriage. On the contrary, marriage has been established by God and has his blessing. But marriage may not be the will of God for you; and if it is not, then you must say no to marriage consciously and deliberately. The same thing holds true for a profession. God has a plan for each life. Our business is to discover it and fulfill it. It may be that when you become a Christian you already are engaged in the work God has for you. If so, you should continue in it joyfully. On the other hand, God may want you to change professions. He may wish to call you into specific Christian work or another profession. If he does, you must be ready to obey.

Under items that may not be God's will for our lives we must give special emphasis to our possessions. This is true for two reasons. First, a love of possessions is something Jesus specifically warned about in his dealings with those who said they wished to follow him. Second, the love of possessions is a particular snare for today's affluent Christians.

On one occasion a rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked what he might do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments—not that it would ever be possible for him to keep them perfectly and receive eternal life thereby, but in order to show him

his need, as the continuation of the story indicates. The young man was evidently a self-satisfied individual, because after Jesus had listed the commandments for him—"You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and Love your neighbor as yourself—the man replied ignorandy, "All these things I have done since I was a boy. What else must I do?" The Lord then put his finger on that sin which for him was greater than all others — his love of possessions. "If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you have and give it to the poor; and you will have treasure in heaven and come and follow me." The young man went away sorrowful, because he had great possessions (Matt. 19:16-26; cf. Mark 10:17-27; Luke 18:1827).

The possession of things is in the same category as marriage or a career, in the sense that they are not wrong in themselves. Indeed, our possessions may well be the gift of God to us to be used rightly. Still, although possessions are not wrong in themselves, they are a special snare for American Christians because they so easily blind us to the needs of others, occupy our time exclusively, and make us self-satisfied and selfish. I know Christians who have immense talent. But they are useless in Christian work because they are fully occupied either managing or enjoying their possessions. Is that what God gave you your possessions for? Did he make you well-off so that you would indulge yourself while others are perishing? Did he make you rich so that you do not need to worry about anything?

Americans have more than anyone else in the world. But it has not made us more compassionate. It has made us indulgent. What would Christ say if he were here? I think he would tell many of us, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you have, and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me."

Taking Up the Cross

Jesus' second directive to explain the meaning of following him is "take up [your] cross daily." This suggests two things. If we had lived in Jesus' day and had seen a man carrying a cross, it would have meant

that the man was a condemned criminal and was on his way to a place of execution. The cross symbolized this. So when Jesus said that those who followed him were to take up their crosses he meant that they were to follow him to death, denying themselves even to the point of facing execution. In this sense the phrase "take up [your] cross" intensifies the phrase "deny [yourself]," as we have expounded it.

The second truth that this requirement suggests goes beyond the earlier statement. To deny yourself is negative. This phrase suggests the positive counterpart to self-denial. It is embracing God's will, including the denial of self, wholeheartedly.

On this point I have been helped by some of the writings of Elisabeth Elliot. She writes, "I think there is a great deal of nonsense taught about this business of bearing our cross. For example, when people shrug their shoulders and say, 'Well, I suppose that's meant to be my cross,' they suggest that the cross is some inevitable circumstance which cannot be avoided. But the cross *can* be avoided. So I think that what Jesus is getting at here is the voluntary positive acceptance of what he is asking of us, whatever it may be. It is not servility. It is not a cop-out. It is not resignation or fatalism. It is a very positive voluntary act of the will, a Yes to God. In other words, we must say No to ourselves in order to say Yes to God.

"This should be the dominant theme of our lives: 'Yes, Lord, what do you want me to do?' There are all kinds of things we cannot avoid: difficulties, blindness, a drunken husband, an intractable teenage child, a limitation of whatever sort (all of us have our particular set of limitations in which we are meant to glorify God). But we can go through life gritting our teeth, clenching our fists and even saying Yes to God in the sense of 'Well, if this is what you want, I'll take it,' without ever once in joy and voluntary obedience saying, 'Yes, Lord, I delight to do this for you.'"

God's will is not grievous. The Bible calls it the way of wisdom and says, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Prov. 3:17). But sometimes it seems grievous to us, and at that point

we must simply live by faith accepting the apparently "grievous" will of God gladly. Elliot concludes, "So let us carry the cross every day, not in the sense of something we hate but in the sense of something which God is asking us to do and which we therefore determine to do joyfully."

"Follow Me"

We come at last to the phrase with which we started: "Follow me." I ask this question: How do we learn the kind of self-denial and taking up of the cross with which Jesus prefaces this command? The answer is: By following him and constantly keeping our eyes upon him. Does this seem like circular reasoning? It seems to be, but it is actually progressive. In order to follow Jesus we must deny ourselves and take up our crosses, but we learn these by following. So it is by degrees and by a continuous discipleship that we learn to follow and by following learn.

How could it be otherwise if Jesus is our supreme example in all things? Where else could we learn self-denial but from him who said no even to the glory of heaven in order to become man and die for our salvation (Phil. 2:5-11). The author of Hebrews captures this when, in the verses immediately following his great chapter on the heroes of the faith, he writes, 'Therefore, since we also are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:1-2).

He is our perfect example. It is an example of self-denial, of taking up the cross—not with a grim determination to do the "undesirable" will of God but, by contrast, to do it joyfully. It was "for the joy that was set before him" that Christ endured the cross.

He did something else too, though the disciples did not understand it at the time. He spoke of his resurrection, thereby teaching that

discipleship, though it involves a true and sometimes painful death to our own desires, is nevertheless the way to the fullness of living both now and hereafter. We find this throughout the New Testament. The apostle Paul writes in Romans, "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection" (Rom. 6:5). We die to self, but we do so in order that we might live to Christ. We die "that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (v. 6). We read the same thing in Galatians. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). In the biblical scheme of things death is always followed by life, crucifixion by resurrection. It is this that is truly exciting and for which we thrill to follow Jesus.

When we give up trying to run our own life or when we give up that thing that seems so precious and so utterly indispensable to us, it is then (and only then) that we suddenly find the true joy of being a Christian and enter into a life so freed from the obsession that we can hardly understand how it could have had such a hold on us.

This is the primary difference between a joyless and a joyful Christian, a defeated and a victorious one. The joyless Christian may have followed Jesus in some general sense. He may have died in Christ abstractly. But he has certainly never known these truths in practice. On the other hand, the joyful Christian has found satisfaction in whatever God dispenses to him and is truly satisfied, for he has said no to anything that might keep him from the richness of God's own presence and life.

Chapter 270.
Things That Should Be Written

John 21:24-25

In this study I come to the end of my exposition of John's Gospel. People aware of the number of years I have spent in the study and exposition of John ask, "How, after the writing of all these sermons, do you find anything new to say about John's Gospel?" In one sense I can understand this question, for I have certainly covered many subjects and explored many lines of thought while studying this book. But in another sense I cannot understand it at all. For, in studying any Scripture portion, the more one seeks to understand and expound the text, the more its truly inexhaustible nature is sensed.

My studies of John began during my years of graduate study in Switzerland, at which time I read nearly every major commentary on the Gospel and delved into hundreds of other studies of particular subjects or problems related to my study. I preached on this book on Sunday mornings at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia for more than eight years. The result is 270 separate sermons occupying nearly 2,000 pages of printed text. There are 2,700 pages of typescript. Yet I have not covered it all; and I suspect that I could do it all over again from the beginning and learn even more than I did the first time—so infinite is God's Word.

Trying to teach John's Gospel in some depth has given me a special perspective from which to understand the last verses, and these in turn have encouraged me as I draw to an end. They are a closing attestation that identifies the Gospel writer and declares his writing trustworthy. Then comes the interesting addition: 'Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." Apparently the author or authors of this verse felt the immensity of what could be written about Jesus and knew that the writer had recorded only a small part.

The Book's Perfection

I sense another thing, and that is the perfection, or wholeness, of the book, expressed in a satisfying rounding off of its material. It begins with Jesus—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with

God" (1:1), and it ends with Jesus—'Jesus did many other things as well" (21:25). It begins with the impressive testimony of John the Baptist—'John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me"' From the fulness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another" (1:15-16). It ends with an equally impressive testimony concerning that other John, the son of Zebedee, who wrote the Gospel—"This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true" (21:24).

There are a number of ways of regarding the plural "we" of verse 24. Some, perhaps the majority of conservative scholars, have taken it as merely an indirect reference by the author to himself. Others see the word as pointing to some official body of Christians who are adding their attestation to John's testimony.

The issue is not a big one, but the second view seems best. Conceivably the author of the Gospel wrote the words. Yet this is improbable. If the author composed these verses, then he is identifying himself as the beloved disciple, which he has avoided doing earlier in the Gospel. Up to this point he has been careful to remain anonymous. Moreover, the first person plural of the final phrase of verse 24 is different from John's own way of referring to himself (e.g., John 19:35). The earlier verse is like these concluding verses in that it refers to the witness of the beloved disciple and affirms that it is reliable. But there the author refers to himself as "he that saw it" and who therefore knows that his is reliable testimony. These last verses distinguish between the writer or writers and the witness: "*we* know that *his* testimony is true."

These facts suggest that the "we" of verse 24 is to be understood as representing some official body—perhaps the church or churches John served—capable of identifying the author with the beloved disciple, an eyewitness of many if not all of the events described, and of attesting his character and the inherent reliability of his testimony.

A Faithful Testimony

I have said that the issue of the authorship of these last verses is not a big one, but that does not mean that there is nothing to be learned from the verses themselves considered in the light of their authorship. In fact, they have much to teach us. They teach that the doctrines of Christianity rest, not on the unstable foundation of mere wishful thinking or speculation, but on facts observed by and duly authenticated by eyewitnesses of Christ's ministry. They say three things about this foundation.

First, they affirm that the men who recorded the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth (in this case, John, the beloved disciple) were *eyewitnesses of the events they describe.* The first phrase of verse 24 points to this by identifying the author of the Gospel with the beloved disciple described as being present with the Lord in Galilee in the verses which immediately precede.

This is of great importance. It would be important in any attempt to establish fact, as, for example, in a criminal trial. In such trials, facts must be established by eyewitness testimony, not by hearsay. In addition to this, the issue of fact is particularly important for Christianity, more so than for virtually any other world religion. In other religions it is usually the founder's ideas that count. In Christianity it is the facts. Is Jesus who he is declared to be? Did he do what he is reported to have done? Did he teach what he is claimed to have taught? Did he actually rise from the dead? Other religions may be content to live by ideas alone. But Christians readily confess that if Jesus is not the Son of God and did not speak with the authority of God, then his ideas have no more validity than any other teacher's and are, in fact, actually worse because he claimed divinity for himself and was therefore either insanely mistaken or deliberately misleading at this point. Christians confess that "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:17). On the other hand, if Jesus is God and did rise from the dead, he deserves and indeed demands our allegiance, and it is the height of folly and even rebellion against God to neglect him. Even more, there is salvation in no one else (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

How can these facts be established? By the eyewitness testimony of those representatives of Christ specially appointed to bear such testimony. These are the apostles, the author of the fourth Gospel being one of them.

No one knew the importance of such testimony more than John, for in his first epistle he says of the apostles' testimony, 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard" (1 John 1:1-3).

Why was John in particular concerned with such testimony? The answer lies in the fact that
John, writing in the latter years of the first Christian century, was among the last of the New Testament writers and was therefore addressing a generation unfamiliar with the eyewitnesses' testimony to Christ's life. When Paul wrote (back in the middle of that century), he could refer almost in passing to "five hundred" who had seen the resurrected Christ, "most of whom were still living" (1 Cor. 15:6). But John could not. These had died in the meantime, and John therefore found it necessary to stress this eyewitness testimony as Christianity's foundation. Besides, when John was writing, a form of Gnosticism was beginning to infiltrate the apostolic churches which denied the need for historical facts as a basis for religious belief. Indeed, it considered faith superior to the facts of history, and it spiritualized them. This threatened true faith. So John more than other writers wants to emphasize Christianity's historical foundations.

We might sum up the matter like this: "An unbelieving world required evidence for the religious claims of Jesus and his followers. And the deviation toward an esoteric religion within the Church required immediate correction by a reiteration of the historical groundings of the

faith." John met such demands by stressing the role of eyewitnesses in establishing the historical claims of Christianity.

Second, the writers of the concluding verses of the Gospel (whoever they may have been) affirm that *the author of the Gospel* not only was an eyewitness of the events he describes but *actually wrote these things down.* It seems a truism to say that the author of a book actually wrote the book, and it is. But it is not a foolish thing to emphasize in view of some of the criticisms of the Scriptures both in the past and now.

People who have not had the opportunity to do extensive New Testament studies can hardly be aware of the degree of reluctance in many scholarly circles to admit that the words of the New Testament go back to eyewitnesses. For many the tone of the documents and the corresponding, nonbiblical evidence compel belief in some kind of historical base for Christianity—though one senses they wish there were none. But others deny it entirely, some radically. Rudolf Bultmann of Germany is the most startling example. For Bultmann and his followers the New Testament in no sense comes from eyewitnesses. Instead, Bultmann envisions a period in which stories of Christ circulated in the church and in which they were formed and embellished (even invented) on the basis of the church's current needs and its "Spirit-led" understanding of the significance of Jesus. The New Testament is therefore the product of the church and not of the apostles, though these undoubtedly exerted an influence in the early stages. On this basis, Bultmann says we can merely affirm that Jesus existed but denies we can have any certain historical information about him.

The authors of John 21:24 did not have Bultmann in mind as they wrote, of course, but by the guidance of the Holy Spirit they did speak directly to his unbelief as well as to that of any other similarly thinking scholars. These verses say that the eyewitness actually "wrote these things." Are they right? Are they speaking truthfully? If they are—and why should the authors of these verses be lying?—then we have in this Gospel (and the others) an accurate account of what the companions of Jesus, led by the Holy Spirit, considered necessary for us to know concerning him. It follows that we can read these words with the

confidence that this is the case, and that Jesus was indeed as they describe him.

These authors affirm a third thing. They have said that the author of the Gospel was an eyewitness of the events of Christ's ministry. They have added that he actually wrote the Gospel, that is, he did not merely communicate these stories verbally while allowing someone else to record them, whether accurately or not, but himself actually did the writing. This said, however, they now add that *the one who has written these things is trustworthy.* Their specific words are: "We know that his testimony is true."

Why should it be necessary to add this statement? For this reason. It is possible that a person could be an eyewitness of the life of Jesus and then sit down to write a gospel about it but for whatever reasons decide to write something other than what he had actually witnessed. He might hate Jesus and therefore invent stories to cast a shadow over his name. Again, he might admire Jesus more than is fit and therefore eliminate anything that could be thought derogatory and instead invent stories or teachings to enhance his image. Such things are possible theoretically. But the authors of these last verses declare that such was not the case. They say instead that John was a man of integrity, that his words can be trusted and that, so far as they were able to verify his teaching (whether by the testimony of other eyewitnesses or by personal interrogation) they have found it to be absolutely trustworthy.

Can we not say the same? We are in no position to verify the facts of Christ's life as they did; we live nearly two thousand years after the events. But we can note that many of these witnesses sealed their testimony by their own blood. Would they give their lives for what they knew to be a put-on? Would they suffer for a farce? To ask such questions is to answer them. Of course not! If ever there were men of integrity, it was these men. If ever a series of events of history has been ruthlessly verified, it is these events.

Do you believe them? Will you believe them? We recall that John himself said of his writing, "These [things] are written that you may

believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31).

One Thing More

There is one more thing that I must mention as I close. I note as I read the last verse of John that the authors seem to be saying that Jesus did many things, all of which are now past, and we could almost interpret that as suggesting that the life of Christ is over. Nothing could be farther from the case. On the contrary, the whole last chapter (which does not even end with an ascension) is meant to show the living Christ in fellowship with his people within the ongoing life of his church.

Due to his union with believers—"I am the vine, you are the branches ... apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5)—there is a sense in which Jesus' life and works are not ended but rather continue in the church as he accomplishes his will through us. I see this in an interesting way. I note that although this Gospel ends with a reference to the "things Jesus did" (past tense), the very first verses of the very next book of the Bible speak of "all that Jesus *began* to do and teach until the day he was taken up" (Acts 1:1-2). It means, if I may put it this way, that in one sense Jesus' life, important and unique as it is, was only a beginning; it lives on in the life, deeds, words, and teachings of his redeemed community.

You are a member of that community if you have believed on Christ as your Savior. You are part of the church if you have been born again. Are you continuing Christ's works? Is his life being lived in you? While we are in this life, all that we will ever know of Jesus' earthly life has already been written. There is no more. We have it in the four Gospels and in a few scattered references in the Epistles. But his works are nevertheless going on, and it is your privilege and duty to be a channel for them.

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12).

Jesus begins that saying with the words "verily, verily" or "amen, amen." It means "truly, truly" or "what I am about to say to you is so."Jesus often began important sayings in that way. We, on our part, also say "amen." But our "amens" properly come at the end of such sayings, by which we acknowledge our acquiescence in his testimony. We have a case at the end of the Gospel. "Amen" is the way the book ends. It means "these things are true, and we who say 'amen' now stake our lives upon them." Is this the case with you? God grant that it may be so, and to him be glory. Amen.

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